

“Mary Ruth” Memories of Mobile... We Still Remember

Stories from the 91st Bomb Group

Lowell L. Getz



Foreword

The Eighth Air Force flew a total of 264,618 individual bomber sorties out of England during World War II. The 91st Bomb Group (Heavy), alone, flew 340 missions. Although many missions were routine, with little action, all too many were anything but routine. Formations often were subjected to continuous German fighter attacks, especially during the early months of the war. Anti-aircraft batteries sent up clouds of flak over most targets. Losses of planes and lives were severe. Many of the returning planes were so badly damaged that they barely were able to struggle back to their bases in England. Casualties among the crews were heavy. Even the “milk runs” were far from uneventful. Assembling the complex formations in the murky skies over England and flying the long distances at subzero temperatures to and from the target in aging, war weary planes was wrought with danger.

Each mission presented its own unique drama about which any number of stories could be told. Unfortunately, only a few accounts of the events transpiring on specific missions have been recorded. The trauma, the terror, the manner in which the airmen responded to the situations are disappearing with the participants. We owe these men such a debt of gratitude, however, that an attempt should be made to record as many of the incidents of the time as possible. It is only through such accounts that later generations will understand and appreciate the dedication and sacrifices of the men who flew in the Eighth Air Force.

In this short compilation of stories, I have put together just a sampling of the events of the time: those associated with an individual B-17 bomber as she “narrates” her own story; the tragic fate of those who flew on three planes bearing the name “Short Snorter”, reference to a good luck talisman; the description of a mission during which one Squadron lost six of eight bombers it sent out, including all five of the Low Squadron; the dedication and devotion of one pilot, from his youth, through the war years, to his ultimate sacrifice 10 years later; the fate of the 20 bombers who flew the last mission with the “Memphis Belle” and who stayed on to fight the air war after the “Belle” and crew returned home; the diary of a pilot; the terror experienced by one squadron as six of its bombers were shot down during one 40-second encounter with German fighters; one squadron on its final mission--the chaos, the drama that occurred, through which the crews and planes endured; an account of a plane and her crew who flew only a few missions, brushed briefly with history, and was lost amongst the exploits of other planes and crews of the time who received notoriety. This crew, this plane, typify those thousands who flew and died in obscurity, but upon whose shoulders, and wings, was carried the brunt of the air war over “Fortress Europe.”

In developing these stories I have located and interviewed crewmen involved in the missions and incidents recorded in the text. Although some have provided excerpts from diaries made at the time, most have relied on recall in providing the details that make up the stories. One must be circumspect in relying on memory of events of more than 50 years prior. Many have warned me to be careful “...as the years go by, the memory fades, but the stories get better.” Accordingly, I have attempted to double-check all accounts by interviewing more than one crewman involved in each of the incidents. I have also relied heavily on official documents from the time in the National Archives and the Air Force Historical Research Agency. Still, there may be (hopefully, few) instances where the details do not correspond exactly to the events as they transpired. Even so, one has to keep in mind that no matter how much a crewman may have “embellished” the details, it is really not possible to make the events more traumatic than they actually were--only the details will differ. The danger, the stark terror, the dedication cannot be embellished upon. The errors are mine. The heroism is theirs.

Lowell L. Getz, Champaign, Illinois

Front cover photograph.

Crew of No. 536, “Mary Ruth” Memories of Mobile. Kneeling from the left: James P. Feerick, bombardier; William R. Brown, tail gunner. Standing, from the left: Henry “Maurice” Crain, ball turret gunner; Raymond Litzo, right waist gunner; James O. Akers, flight engineer/top turret gunner; William “Glenn” Allen, left waist gunner; Richard O. Maculley, radio operator; Vincent J. Bliley, navigator; Kenneth L. Brown, pilot; James H. Quenin, copilot. Sgts Allen and Maculley were killed when the “Mary Ruth” was shot down on 22 June 1943. (Ken Brown)

“Mary Ruth” Memories of Mobile... We Still Remember

Stories From the 91st Bomb Group

Contents

Another Time, Another Place—Lady Lois, Little Jean.....	1
Good Luck Talisman or Tragic Jinx? Saga of the Short Snorters.....	29
Return From Bremen. The Low Squadron is Gone.....	41
One Came Home. The Stories of Those Left Behind.....	49
Don Judy—His Flight From Mercer Island to Long Island.....	81
A Pilot’s Diary. William H. Arthur.....	89
Forty Seconds Over Eisenach.....	105
Pandemonium Over Pilsen—The Forgotten Final Mission.....	123
“Mary Ruth” Memories of Mobile...We Still Remember.....	133
The Coen Crew. A Dedication.....	139

Copyright © 2001
Lowell L. Getz

Another Time, Another Place--Lady Lois, Little Jean

The Attic

The bare 100-watt overhead bulb flashes on. Jagged shadows scurry across barren rafters lining the stark ceiling. A metal-on-wood grating sound accompanies the dissonant screeching of rusty springs as the folding stairs are pulled down. Wooden steps creak under the weight of heavy feet. Someone is coming up to the attic, the first time in over two years.

"Oh my God! Would you look at all this clutter, Jim. Why didn't she just throw it away instead of lugging it up here for us to haul back down again?" "You know Mom, Bets. Never could throw anything away. Thought she might need it someday. Dad always said he didn't want to outlive her and have to clean out the attic." They sound older and wearied, but I still recognize them, the twins, Betsy and Jim. The last time I heard them they were the vibrant voices of youth leaving for college and the world beyond.

They slowly scuffle through the disarray--old lamps with dented paper shades, a wire magazine holder, cracked crochet mallets falling from their wobbly wooden stand, an old red paint-chipped tricycle, an equally scarred blue 16-inch boy's bicycle, a conglomeration of sagging cardboard boxes filled with tattered toys, faded baby clothes, frayed children's books, tired old dolls, and tangled Christmas decorations. A life-time accumulation of family relics. The shuffling approaches. I feel the touch of a hand, less soft than the last time. "Would you look at this, Jim. She even kept the old waffle iron. I figured it had given up the ghost and been tossed years ago. Remember the Sunday morning ritual--waffles, sausage and fried eggs?" "Yep, even remember how exciting it was that first morning we came down and Mom was fixing real waffles--just like we ordered at Mildred's Sunrise Cafe. Wonder if it still works? Take it down and see. We can't get into cleaning this out until tomorrow anyway."

So we leave the attic. Being careful not to drop me, Betsy backs down the stairs to the garage. Into the kitchen. Haven't been here for 15 years or so. Quite a few changes. A new tile floor. Different curtains on the windows. New pictures and potted plant holders on the walls, fluorescent light fixtures instead of the old white incandescent globes, a new stove and refrigerator, and she finally got a dish washer! The walls are cream instead of white, but the cabinets and counter top are still the same. Plugged in the wall socket, we wait a few minutes. "Must be burned out, Bets. Don't feel any heat."

That's OK. I have felt more heat than anyone should ever have to experience. Much of the

heat that I felt was in another time, in another place, when I was a part of something much more formidable, something much more momentous, something much more noble than a mere waffle iron. Decades ago, before I became a part of this family's traditional Sunday morning breakfast, the metal used to make this serene kitchen appliance had been a part of a large complex instrument of war.

The Beginning

The first time I felt heat was after arriving in the refinery at Hurricane Creek, Arkansas from the bauxite mine over in Saline County. The reddish brown ore was dumped into digesters heated to 200 F to remove the "Red Mud" impurities. From there it was into immense precipitator tanks to form crystallized alumina. Next were the 2,000 F rotator kilns, out of which came purified white powder alumina. Then, on to the smelting plant at nearby Jones Mill and into large 1,800 F electrolytic cells. Molted aluminum spewed from the cells into 50 pound ("Pigs") and 1,000 pound ("Sows") ingot molds. After cooling, the ingots were loaded onto railroad cars and rushed to a sundry of manufacturing plants in and around Seattle, Washington. Once again I felt heat as some of the ingots were melted down and poured into a myriad of molds. Others were heated and rolled out into thin sheets that were cut into a multitude of uniquely shaped pieces. The results, hundreds of parts, some small, some large.

These aluminum pieces, along with more complex electrical motors, pumps, tubing, wiring, gauges and thousands of other components, shipped in from subcontractors throughout the country, were delivered to a large open building camouflaged to look like a residential city from above. There they were placed next to short moving production lines leading to assembly fixture areas where the parts came together into larger completely integrated units. These completed units were moved by overhead cranes to a final assembly position. The various assembled units were bolted or riveted together and the hundreds of wires, tubes and cables connected together by workers swarming over me. Many of these workers were women, most of whom seemed to have the same name. At least the guys kept calling them "Rosie." First a large cylindrical shell took shape. Then came wings, a tail, four Wright-Cyclone engines, wheel assemblies, a top turret, and a Sperry ball turret from the Maytag factory in Newton, Iowa. I moved on my own wheels to the last two positions along the line where

I was inspected closely and a few final parts installed. On the 8th of July 1944 everything was in place and I was rolled out onto the apron in front of the assembly building. The sun reflected off my shiny silver Alcad aluminum skin. This was the first good look I had of what I had become. What I saw was, if I do say so myself, a very "graceful lady", a B-17 Boeing Flying Fortress. Stenciled in black on a small plate just below the pilot's window on the left side of the plane:

U.S. Army Model B-17G-92826-R

Air Forces Serial No. 43-38220

Crew Weight 1200 lbs.

Off to War

An extensive test flight indicated everything was in working order and I was deemed air worthy. On July 12th 1944 I was accepted by the Army Air Corps and officially placed into the inventory. I was ready to begin my military career. But in what capacity? The answer was quick in coming. That very same day I was flown to Great Falls, Montana and then on to the United Airlines modification center at Cheyenne, Wyoming, arriving the 14th of July. There, my tail gun assembly was modified to a more advance system, the "Cheyenne Tail." This work was finished on the 19th. I was flown to Kearny, Nebraska on the same day. A B-17 crew on its way to England took over on the 22nd. We flew to Grenier Air Field at Manchester, New Hampshire, where we laid over until the 1st of August. Then it was on to Dow Field at Bangor, Maine. Finally, on the 3rd we were off to England with a stop-over in Gander, Newfoundland. We arrived at Prestwick, Scotland on the 8th. There I remained until it was decided where I would be stationed.

On August 18th a crew flew me to USAF Station 121, Bassingbourn, home of the 91st Bombardment Group (Heavy) of the 1st Air Division of the 8th Air Force, under the overall command of General James B. Doolittle. Bassingbourn, along with 61 other heavy bomber and fighter bases, was located in the region of England northeast of London commonly referred to as "East Anglia." The 91st Group, commanded by Col Henry W. Terry, had been made famous back in the States earlier in the year with the release of William Wyler's documentary film, "The Memphis Belle." "Memphis Belle" had been a member of the 91st Bomb Group. And, I was assigned to her old Squadron, the 324th. The other Squadrons in the 91st Group were the 322nd, 323rd and 401st.

As soon as my assignment to the 324th was made, Cpls Tony Starcer of the 322nd Squadron and Charlie Busa of the 324th Squadron, both working out of the Dope and Fabric Shop of the 441st Sub Depot, drove out to my hardstand in their jeep fitted

with scaffolding that reached up to the top of the tail fin and to the sides of the fuselage. From this they painted the large black 324th Squadron code letters, DF, along with my radio call letter, L, on both sides of the fuselage. Usually, planes were designated by the last three digits of their serial numbers. The crews also often used the Squadron and radio call letters. Accordingly, I was referred to as No. 220 or DF-L. Unofficially, many of the planes were given names by their crews. The names usually were accompanied by colorful pictures, "nose art", painted on the nose of the plane.

On my tail Tony and Charlie also painted a 40 inch vertical red band, with a large black triangle enclosing a white letter "A", the 91st Group marker. Below the "Triangle A" they painted my serial number, which had been painted there at the Boeing factory, but covered over by the red band, and my radio call letter. My wing tips and leading edge of the tail fins were painted red, additional 91st markers, and a "Triangle A" was painted on the top of the outer right wing. I was now a full member of the 324th and ready for combat.

My ground crew chief was Sgt Luther W. Heimbaugh, from Melroy, Pennsylvania. Luther had been the crew chief of 2Lt Vincent A. Fonke's No. 012 which had been shot down, along with five other planes from the 324th Squadron enroute to the Ju 88 wing factory at Halle, Germany two days earlier. It would be Luther's responsibility to see that I was ready for each of my missions. In reality Luther considered me to be "his plane." He only "loaned" me for the day to the flight crews to fly their missions. Luther was assisted ably by Sgts Alvin C. Robbins, Charles P. Blausner and William J. Moore.

I was soon to learn how the 91st Group was flying its formations at that time. Three of the four Squadrons assigned to the Group would fly on a given mission. Each Squadron usually would put up 12 planes, flying in four, three-plane V-shaped "Elements." The front plane of each Element was the "Element Lead", the plane to the right rear (on the "right wing" of the lead), "No. 2", and the one to the left rear (on the "left wing"), "No. 3." The four Elements were arranged in an echelon to the left box formation with the First Element (Squadron Lead Element) in the front. The Second Element flew about 50 ft above and slightly behind the right side of the No. 2 plane of the Lead Element; the Third Element positioned itself 50 ft below and just behind the No. 3 plane in the Lead Element. The Fourth Element flew 50 ft below the Third Element and directly behind the Lead Element. See page 27 for a diagram of the Squadron formation flown at this time.

Such arrangement of the planes provided a high degree of overlapping fields of fire from the

various gun positions on each plane, while reducing the probability of hitting other planes in the Squadron. The No. 3 position in the Fourth Element was the most exposed to enemy fighters of all the planes in the Squadron, in respect to interlacing fields of machine gun fire. This position was usually referred to as "Tail End Charlie", obviously not the choice of places to be in the formation. New crews typically were relegated to "Tail End Charlie." If they survived long enough, the crews moved up in the formation.

One Squadron would be designated the "Lead Squadron" for the Group. The Group was organized with the Lead Squadron flying in front, the "High Squadron" to the right of and 100 feet above and 100 feet behind the Lead Squadron. The "Low Squadron" flew to the left of and 100 feet below and 100 feet behind the Lead Squadron. The Group Lead (the officer in command of the Group formation) flew as copilot in the Lead plane of the Lead Element in the Lead Squadron. In addition to the Norden bombsight (which operated visually), the Lead plane was equipped with a radar-guided bombsight located in the radio compartment. The plane was referred to as a "Mickey plane" and the radar bombsight operator, the "Mickey Operator." The bombardiers of the other 11 planes in the Squadron would drop ("toggle") their bomb load when they saw the Lead plane drop its bombs, whether visually by the regular bombardier, or by the Mickey Operator. A smoke streamer was released with the bombs to tell the other toggliers/bombardiers when to toggle their bomb load. The Lead plane of the Second Element, often also a Mickey Plane, was the Squadron "Deputy Lead." It would take over lead of the Squadron should something happen to the Lead plane.

The Squadron not flying ("stood down") a given day would loan planes to the Squadrons that were short of serviceable aircraft for the mission. The stood-down Squadron also provided "Spares" that were preflighted and loaded with the appropriate bombs. Should a plane malfunction when the engines were run up or on take-off, the crew would switch to a Spare to fly the mission. At least one Squadron, usually the High Squadron, would send up an extra plane. It would fly to the rear of the Second Element, forming a "diamond" pattern. If a plane in one of the Squadrons had to abort the mission, the Spare plane would move into the vacated position. If there were no abort, the Spare would fly on to the target as originally formed up.

I was listed to fly my first combat mission on the 24th of August, to the Kolleda and Goslar Airfields, with a crew led by 2Lt Lawrence E. Gaddis. We took off as briefed at 0716 hours, in heavy clouds, with almost zero visibility. I would

soon learn such conditions were the norm for East Anglia. Because of the limited visibility, we could not find the 91st Group formation. Lt Gaddis saw the 398th Bomb Group from Nuthampstead forming up so, according to standing orders, fell in with them. Then he heard the 91st Group formation radio call-in (11 minutes late) and turned back to join them, but still could not locate the 91st in the overcast. By then it was too late to catch up with the 398th Group. So, we jettisoned our bomb load over the Channel and the navigator, 2Lt Curtis I. Strong, plotted our course back to Bassingbourn. We landed at 1020 hours and taxied back to our hardstand. Sort of a let-down from the anxious anticipation of going into combat.

Bill Arthur Crew

The same day I arrived in the 324th, a crew from the 401st Squadron was transferred to the 324th. This crew included: pilot, Cpt William H. Arthur; copilot, 2Lt John M. Henderson; navigator, 1Lt Robert H. Boyd; bombardier, 1Lt William J. Swindell; top turret gunner/flight engineer, T/Sgt Jimmy E. Yanzick; radio operator, T/Sgt Milton Ehrlich; waist gunner, S/Sgt Charles E. Lee; ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Michael J. Sesta; tail gunner, S/Sgt John P. McCann. While in the 401st Bill's crew had flown 16 missions, 10 of them in No. 069, "Round Trip Topsy." Although I was designated as the primary 324th plane for Bill and his crew, they had flown in No. 515, "The Wild Hare" on the 24th.

Two days later, August 26th, I was on the flight list again. This time, with Bill's crew aboard. Our bomb load consisted of eight 500 pound General Purpose bombs. The crew arrived "on station" (at the hardstand) at 0745 hours. We started engines at 0815 hours, taxied at 0820, and lifted off at 0845 hours. We formed up in the No. 3 position in the Fourth Element, "Tail End Charlie", of the Lead Squadron as we circled around the "Buncher" radio beacon at Bassingbourn. We left the English Coast at 1040 hours, flying at 15,200 feet, arrived the Enemy Coast at 1122 hours and an altitude of 23,500 ft. The Group had to do an "S-ing" maneuver to lose two minutes so as to avoid running up on a Bomb Group flying ahead of us. We hit the IP ("Initial Point", the beginning of the bomb run) at 1224 hours and 29,000 ft and were over the target, the synthetic oil refinery at Gelsenkirchen, at 1232, still at 29,000 ft. When Lt Swindell triggered the bomb release only 4 dropped. He finally got the others to release, but by this time we were 60 seconds, and several miles, beyond the target. We rallied off the target, tightened up the formation, made a turn and headed home. We left the Enemy Coast at 1307 hours and 16,500 ft, arrived the English Coast at 1348 and 4,000 ft, and touched down at Bassingbourn at 1448 hours. My first mission was in the books. Although Bill

entered in his diary that we had encountered "heavy flak" over the target, there were only three small holes in my fuselage. Another piece had hit the frame of the knock-out window directly in front of Lt Henderson's face and bounced off. Should have seen him jump! Bill apparently liked me. Another entry in his diary that night said "Flew DF-L Love our new ship and it's a honey--even have armor plate in my seat!"

After returning from Gelsenkirchen, the crew decided on my name. I was to be called "Lady Lois" after Bill's wife, Lois, who, back in Ilion, New York was expecting their first baby. Bill was happy to be able to name his own plane, after flying already-named planes. "Round Trip Topsy" had been named by 1Lt Richard T. Pressey for his wife, Travis Overbeck (nicknamed, "Topsy", after her initials). On the 27th of May, "Round Trip Topsy" was being repaired from flak damage incurred on an earlier mission. Lt Pressey's crew flew in No. 042, "Liberty Run", on a mission to Ludwigshaven. "Liberty Run" had two engines knocked out by flak before the target and could not make it back to England. Lt Pressey headed to Switzerland where he and his crew were interned. Bill's crew later inherited "Round Trip Topsy."

For my "nose art" Bill picked out a picture for Cpl Starcer, who was also the "nose artist" for the 91st, to paint on my nose. He settled on a sedately seated attractive brunette wearing a modest blue, with large white stars, two-piece bathing suit and red shoes. Guess Bill figured his wife would not appreciate being represented by a scantily clad Vargas or Petty Girl copied from Esquire Magazine, as Tony had so graphically rendered on a number of other planes, including "Round Trip Topsy." To the right of the girl Tony painted in large block blue letters "Lady Lois." Now I was not just a number.

The next mission, on the 27th, was briefed for Berlin. However, after we were in the air the scouting force radioed back that Berlin was clouded over. Were diverted to the secondary target, Heligoland Island naval base. Owing to heavy cloud cover, we could locate neither the secondary target nor a Target of Opportunity so the entire Strike Force turned back north of Heligoland and brought our bombs home. We saw no German fighters, but a lot of flak. No damage, however. I flew again on the 30th. Bill and his crew were stood down for this mission. They had flown the last three missions and as was the usual procedure, were given a break from flying. 1Lt Royal E. Manville and his crew flew me to the U-boat pens and ship yards at Kiel where we dropped all five of our 1,000 pounders on target. Finally--a complete mission. But, again, little excitement.

I was now beginning to wonder if flying

combat missions over "Fortress Europe" was really as dangerous as we had been made to believe. My first attempt at a mission never got beyond the Channel. The three we did complete were routine--"milk runs", the crews called them. The flak mostly was meagre or ineffective and we had seen no German fighters. We had dropped a full bomb load on only one target. In fact, I was a little more concerned about my own people than I was as to what the Germans might do to me. On our return from Gelsenkirchen, Bill encountered some heavy prop wash when he tried to land and almost dipped a wing into the runway before powering up to go around again. On the second try we overshot the runway and had to go around for a third attempt before we got down. A lot of other planes were also overshooting the runway. When we did land, we found out that we had landed *with* the wind--scary. This was not according to the manual. The flight controllers were bringing us down in the wrong direction, landing us down-wind!

Then came reality check time, a mission to the Opau Synthetic Chemical Plant at Ludwigshaven on Friday, September 8th. On that day I got a taste of what air combat over Europe was really like. I saw my first B-17 shot down and got my first sight of men being killed. I realized then that I was in a rather perilous profession.

Bill's crew was back aboard. We lifted off at 0743 hours and entered the continent near Le Havre, France flying just north of Paris on our way to the German border. We were Lead of the Fourth Element in the Lead Squadron. Although several German fighters came up after us, our "Little Friends", the P-51 fighter escort, kept them at bay. But, no one could stop the box barrage and tracking flak, both 88's and 105's, that came up at us on the bomb run. There was "red flak" all around us. When you see the red in the flak burst, it is close--much too close.

A number of planes were hit hard before we reached the target. One was the Group Lead, No. 632, flown by 1Lt Ray M. Brown with our new Squadron CO, Cpt Immanuel ("Manny") Klette flying as copilot and Group Leader. A piece of flak came up through the floor hitting the Mickey Operator, 1Lt Gordon H. Lowe in the left calf and above the knee. In spite of the seriousness of his wounds, Lt. Lowe remained over the bombsight until reaching the target and the bombs were dropped. Only then did he allow the crew to tend to his wounds. The waist gunner, S/Sgt Milton D. Pitts, was also wounded in the right shoulder by the flak burst. There was very little damage to No. 632 and Lt Brown had no problem bringing her home. However, Lt Lowe spent several weeks in the hospital and two weeks in a rest home before he

returned to flight status. For staying at his position until the bomb run was completed, Lt Lowe was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Thirty seconds before the target No. 348, "Roxy's Special", of the 322nd Squadron, piloted by 1Lt David McCarty, flying Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron, took a direct hit in the No. 3 engine, setting the right wing afire. The bombardier, 2Lt Frank S. Bolen, had the target in his bomb sight when they were hit. The gas load exploded almost immediately, causing the right wing to blow off throwing her into a downward spin. A few seconds later, "Roxy's Special" exploded in a giant ball of fire and debris, killing seven of the nine-man crew. Only the navigator, 1Lt Donald L. Brazdzons, and Lt Bolen were blown free of the nose section to parachute safely to earth and become POWs.

No. 205, "The Ruptured Duck", of the 324th was flying up ahead of us in the No. 3 position of the Second Element of our Lead Squadron. The copilot, 2Lt Gilbert B. Willis, was hit in the neck and killed instantly by a flak burst on the right side of the cockpit while on the bomb run. Lt Willis had been our copilot when Lt Gaddis attempted to take me on my first mission the 24th of August. Flak also severely injured the pilot, 2Lt Elbert W. Weeks. His right hand was shattered and a deep wound gouged in his left thigh. A number of arteries in his hand were severed, causing considerable loss of blood. Lt Weeks refused any aid until they had completed the bomb run and the top turret gunner/flight engineer, T/Sgt Henry G. Saunders, had removed Lt Willis' body from the seat. Only then did Lt Weeks allow a tourniquet be placed on his arm. The same flak burst that hit Lts Willis and Weeks also threw shards into the No. 3 engine and the landing gear. Because of the damage to the No. 3 engine, Lt Weeks felt it wise to land on the continent rather than risk the flight back England. Accordingly, he headed for Allied-occupied France. Lt Weeks, assisted by Sgt Saunders and the bombardier, 2Lt Marvin G. Nachtsheim, brought the damaged plane down safely on a crater-ridden advanced U.S. fighter air strip at Merville, France. "The Ruptured Duck" was repaired and returned to flight status with the 91st two days later.

No. 128, "Dear Becky", with 1Lt Freeman C. Beasley as first pilot, was flying on our left wing. Just before the target, the copilot, 2Lt Howard C. Donahue, heard a click and saw a small flak hole appear in the windshield directly in front of Lt Beasley. He then saw a hole in the front of Lt Beasley's helmet and blood running down over his face. As Lt Beasley pitched forward onto the control column, Lt Donahue saw a hole in the back of the helmet with blood streaming down the back of his neck. Lt Donahue thought he was dead. When Lt

Beasley fell onto the control column, he also hit the rudder pedal. This caused "Dear Becky" to swerve to the right almost hitting us. Sgt McCann called Bill over the intercom from the tail to tell him that "Dear Becky" had missed us by inches. "Dear Becky" then pitched over in a downward dive. Lt Donahue got control of the aircraft after she had dropped down to about 12,000 feet and tried to pull her back up into the formation. Lt Beasley was not dead and came to about this time. Unfortunately he was completely disoriented and started struggling with Lt Donahue to take over control of the plane. The Flight Engineer, T/Sgt Evan J. Zillmer, had been thrown up against the Plexiglas of the top turret when "Dear Becky" dropped down and then down onto the floor when Lt Donahue pulled her back up. When he was able to get back on his feet, Sgt Zillmer came into the cockpit, restrained Lt Beasley and moved him down into the nose of the plane where he lost consciousness again. Sgt Zillmer and the navigator, 1Lt Charles R. Bright, removed Lt Beasley's helmet. The piece of flak had cut a groove through the top of his skull, exposing the brain. Someone had snatched the morphine from the plane's first aid kit, so Sgt Zillmer and Lt Bright sprinkled sulfa powder in the wound. Because of the damage to the plane, Lt Donahue could not get "Dear Becky" back into the formation. He asked Lt Bright to plot a course for Bassingbourn and they headed back alone.

In a short while Lt Beasley once again regained consciousness and dragged himself back into his seat. He took over the controls and flew the plane with one arm until eventually becoming too weak to continue. Sgt Zillmer moved him back to the nose compartment and got into the pilot's seat to assist Lt Donahue in flying the plane back to Bassingbourn. As they crossed the continental coast a German flak battery opened up on "Dear Becky", hitting the No. 2 engine. On approaching Bassingbourn, they discovered the left landing gear and landing flap electrical systems had been knocked out. Sgt Zillmer had to hand crank down the left wheel in order that they could land. Sgt Zillmer then got back into the pilot's seat and assisted Lt Donahue in landing. Lt Beasley survived, but did not fly again. "Dear Becky" was repaired and continued flying.

As our Squadron approached the target, 1Lt Arnold J. O'Toole, pilot of No. 135, flying on the right wing of the Group Lead had his foot mashed by a piece of flak that went through his flying boot. The flak shard also took out the rudder controls after it went through his boot. Lt O'Toole refused first aid and remained at the controls until they had dropped and were safely out of the flak zone. He then went down to the nose compartment to have his wounds dressed. Since the flak hits had also started a fire in the waist of the plane, Lt O'Toole

asked the navigator, 1Lt Walter L. Strait, to plot a course for a friendly field at Paris. However, the waist gunner, Sgt Alton Lowe, and radio operator, T/Sgt Emile R. Gelinas, were able to put the fires out. They headed for Bassingbourn instead. As they approached the base, Lt O'Toole went back to the cockpit to assist in landing. With so many of the controls gone, he asked if the crew wanted to bail out. None did. He then had three of them go into the tail to weight it down, and landed with the plane on autopilot for better control.

Just before the target, a plane from the 398th Group, with its No. 4 engine on fire, came down on top of us. Sgt Yanzick in the top turret spotted it in time to sound the alarm. With a display of quick reflexes, Bill swerved out of its way.

All the while flak was tearing into us as we dropped our six General Purpose 1,000 pounders on the target. Sgt Lee was in the ball turret that day. He got so mad at the intensity of the flak coming up at him that he rotated the twin .50 caliber machine guns into the down position and fired off a long burst in the direction of the anti-aircraft guns--over four miles below. The rest of the crew, including Bill laughed at these futile antics. At least it relieved some of Sgt Lee's frustrated tension. Lt Boyd hung his hat and intercom headset on a knob near his seat when he put on his helmet. When he went to retrieve them, he found that a piece of flak had flown through the nose, tearing apart his hat and headset.

Lt Henderson was at the controls when we landed at 1517 hours. A perfect landing. We had been gone 7 hours 35 minutes. After we had taxied to our hardstand and a count made, there were more than 50 holes in the fuselage and wings. The leading edge of the right wing was torn away and several Plexiglas panels in the nose were shot out. Three right wing gas tanks had taken hits, requiring that they be replaced. Luckily, none of the crew had been hit. Plenty of wounded on the other planes, though. Several red flares arched up from the landing planes, indicating wounded aboard. There were ambulances at the end of the runway when we landed. Luther and his ground crew were busy the next few days putting me back in shape. I had survived my first real taste of aerial combat. Bill added another entry about me in his diary that night. "Lady Lois is sure a good ship--climbs beautifully."

The 324th was stood down on the 13th, but it appeared I was ready to fly and was loaned to the 322nd to be used by 1Lt John D. Longaker and his crew for a mission to the synthetic oil plant at Lutzendorf. We lifted off at 0720 hours, but less than an hour out, the oxygen system developed a leak and we had to abort back to Bassingbourn, touching down at 0910.

On the 17th the 91st Group threw a party to end all parties. It was the second anniversary of the Group arriving in England. C hanger was decorated with parachutes hanging from the ceiling. There was a band at each end of the hanger with dancing in between. On the base streets, a keg of beer at every corner. Army trucks, referred to by the troops as "Passion Wagons", were sent out to bring in girls from the nearby villages and towns for the party. Everyone let go and forgot the war for the day and night. Sounds of music and revelry carried out through the damp night air to the quiet hardstands until early in the morning. Many of the girls did not get back home before late the next afternoon, some not until two or three days later. Strangely, in later years one could not find a woman who had ever gone to a party at an 8th Air Force base. However, all "knew of a friend who had gone."

Finally, on Tuesday, the 19th, Luther and his crew had all the kinks straightened out and I was ready to fly. Bill's crew was stood down for the day. With 1Lt Charles C. Whitesell's crew aboard, we flew on the right wing of the Group Lead, No. 135, flown by 1Lt Ray M. Brown's crew, to the marshalling yards at Hamm. A relatively quiet trip with only minor flak hits on the fuselage over the target.

On Thursday Bill and his crew were back with me again, this time to the marshalling yards at Mainz. We flew Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron. Because of heavy fog, take-off at 1014 hours and assembly were on instruments, but the trip to and from the target was routine. The weather at Bassingbourn was even murkier by the time we got back. We had to go around three times before Bill could get us down on the runway and back to the hardstand. On one of the passes, another B-17 suddenly appeared coming straight at us out of the fog. Bill pulled up at the very last second, avoiding a head-on collision. Again, I was impressed by Bill's sharp reflexes. Because of the dense fog, we never did know which plane it was. When Bill got back to his quarters after debriefing, there was a telegram from his father-in-law waiting for him. Bill was the proud father of a daughter, Lois Anne, born on the 17th of September. Had it not been for his quick reflexes, Bill would never have known he had a daughter, and Lois Anne would never have met her dad.

The following two missions, to the industrial areas at Frankfurt on the 25th and the Ford Motor factory at Cologne on the 27th of September, were milk runs. Only minor flak damage on both missions and no enemy fighters. Seemed kind of odd to be dropping bombs on factory buildings with the familiar script "Ford" logo painted on the roofs. Sort of sacrilege, but the plants were making spare parts for vehicles left behind by the British when

they evacuated Dunkirk back in 1940. None of the 421 B-17s the 1st Air Division put up on the 27th was lost. Over in the 2nd Air Division, however, 28 of the 37 B-24 Liberator bombers the 445th Bomb Group, flying out of Tibenham, sent to Kassel that day were shot down, the largest loss of any Bomb Group on any mission of the war. The 445th Group formation was decimated by massive attacks in "company front" formations of up to 48 FW 190 fighters, coming at them in wedges of 8-16 planes, each.

Next, it was to the synthetic oil refineries at Magdeburg on the 28th. Swarms of Me 109s and FW 90s swept through the formation, but we avoided their cannon and machine gun fire. One exploding anti-aircraft shell sent a chunk of flak into the No. 2 engine supercharger. An inch lower and it would have caused the bucket wheel to blow apart. That flying metal could have been more dangerous than the flak bursts. We were flying Lead of the Third Element of the High Squadron. The Mickey bomb sight on the Group Lead was working only intermittently, so the bombardier switched to visual bombing 20 seconds before the target. This resulted in some confusion, causing the target to be missed. Our Squadron Lead bombardier sensed there was a problem and did not drop with the Group Lead. We held our ten 500 pound General Purpose bombs, dropping them on the near-by Eschwege Air Drome.

The ensuing missions literally flew by--the 30th to bridges over the Dortmund-Ems Canal south of Munster, the 3rd of October to railway yards at Nurnburg and the 6th to the Junkers 88 aircraft factories at Neubrandenburg. The latter was a long, 9 hour 40 minute mission. The formation on the 6th was not good; we were scattered all over the sky, but the most precise bombing the 91st had done to date.

On Saturday, the 7th it was to Freiburg, a target of opportunity when the primary target, Brux, Czechoslovakia, was clouded over. On returning to the field, Sgt Sesta forgot to stow his ball turret guns in the rear-pointing position. The barrels were locked straight down when he left the ball for landing. The tower alerted us at the last minute and we went around again while he stowed his guns properly. A close call; could have torn apart the fuselage, ending my brief career then and there.

When the curtain was pulled back on the briefing map on the 9th of October, the red cord ran to the marshalling yards at Schweinfurt. There were not the groans or expletives from the flight crews as were emitted when the cord first ran its course to this target back on 17 August 1943. A scant 12 months ago, Schweinfurt was one of the most feared targets in Europe. The 91st had led the 17 August mission with a loss of 10 of the 24 B-17s it sent out. Most of those that returned were severely damaged. Two had to be salvaged. On the 14th of October

1943, the 91st went again to Schweinfurt. This time the Group lost only one aircraft. However, the Strike Force lost 60 bombers. What a difference a year makes. Our mission on the 9th of October 1944 was to be just another deep penetration into Germany. We flew Lead of the Third Element of the Low Squadron. We saw no German fighters and flak over the target was meagre. But, true to the old days, I took severe flak hits in the tail and in the No. 3 engine. Although Bill brought us back home safely with touch-down at 1745 hours, my entire rudder had to be replaced before I could fly again.

The repairs were completed in time for another mission to Cologne on Sunday October 15th, a memorable mission for several reasons. It was the 35th combat mission for Bill. After this one, his war would be over and he could return to Ilion to meet Lois Anne. The 91st had also gone to Cologne the day before. Although the bomb load for that day was 250 and 500 pound bombs and M-17 incendiaries, No. 851, "The Qualified Quail", with 1Lt John J. Askin's crew aboard, had dropped leaflets. These consisted of a German language edition of the Army newspaper, The Stars and Stripes, with the headline, "General Doolittle Challenges Luftwaffe to Air Duel." The duel was to take place over Cologne at noon the next day, the 15th. The article went on to avow that the current German fighter pilots were cowards and possessed neither the skills nor the courage of their now deceased predecessors.

You can image in the "oohs" and "aahs" that went up in the briefing room at 0400 hours on the 15th when the curtain was pulled back revealing the red line ending once again at Cologne. We were Lead of the Third Element of the Lead Squadron.

The expected swarms of fighters did not materialize. Instead, the Germans had brought in gobs of their mobile anti-aircraft guns. Lots of red flak--the worst flak concentrations the 91st Group had encountered in 22 months of flying combat missions.

Just as we turned on the IP, No. 040, "Shirley Jean", flying on our right wing was hit hard by flak, knocking out both the No. 2 and No. 3 engines. The pilot, Cpt Iver O. Tufty, ordered the crew to "prepare to bail out." Four crewmen (top turret gunner, T/Sgt Hugh T. Howard; radio operator, Sgt Lloyd M. Boxx; waist gunner, S/Sgt William Econonu; tail gunner, S/Sgt Casimera A. Sidlowski) misunderstood his order and bailed out to become POWs for the duration. All four had been on Lt Gaddis' crew when he tried to fly me on my first mission the 24th of August. Cpt Tufty managed to keep the plane in the air. "Shirley Jean", along with the remaining crew, made it safely back to an emergency landing at Woodbridge. She eventually was repaired and returned to Bassingbourn.

No. 880, "Little Miss Mischief", was flying "Tail End Charley" in our Lead Squadron, with 1Lt Paul R. McDowell's crew aboard. She took a hit before the target that blew a huge gaping hole through the left waist of the fuselage and tore apart the left side of the ball turret. M/Sgt Glenn L. Slaughter, the waist gunner, was wounded in the foot and ribs. In the ball turret, M/Sgt Edmund Abdo was hit in the left leg and foot by flak fragments. Because his electric suit was rendered inoperable, Sgt Abdo's hands, feet and neck were frost-bitten from the subzero wind blowing through the holes in the turret. More seriously, the turret could not be rotated to expose the exit hatch. Sgt Abdo was trapped in the turret for the rest of the flight and the landing. This was a potentially fatal situation should the landing gear collapse on touchdown. The flak had also severed the rudder and trim tab cables and shot away all the electronics except for those to the engines. Even though almost cut in two, "Little Miss Mischief" remained in the air. The flight engineer, T/Sgt James Hobbs, worked furiously to splice the trim cables so that Lt McDowell would have some degree of control of the aircraft on landing. The bombs were jettisoned to lighten the load. Struggling along at 100-110 MPH, "Little Miss Mischief" made it back to Bassingbourn where, with the landing gear hand-cranked down, she made a safe landing. Sgt Abdo was not told there was a problem in lowering the landing gear until he was taken from the turret. The crew figured he had enough on his mind as it was.

Since the front half of the aircraft was relatively undamaged, the 441st Sub Depot searched for a replacement for the rear half of the plane. Eventually they located a suitable plane (No. 405, "Wallaroo Mark II", of the 303rd Bomb Group, at nearby Molesworth). She had crash-landed at the RAF base at Heston the 7th of August and was declared salvage on the 12th of August. The undamaged rear half of "Wallaroo Mark II" was brought to Bassingbourn and the two halves married together to form a flyable plane. What made the rebuilt aircraft unique was the fact that the original "Little Miss Mischief" was silver and "Wallaroo Mark II" was painted olive drab. Made for a strange looking plane. Because of this, the crews nicknamed her "Half and Half." The unusual looking new "Little Miss Mischief" was to fly another 15 missions. There was a similar silver/olive drab B-17 over in the 457th Bomb Group, aptly named "Arf n' Arf."

Although I took a beating over Cologne, none of the 20 hits was especially serious. Still, one of the "Tokyo Tanks" (outer wing tanks that had been added to the original design of the B-17 to increase our range) was punctured, the oil line to No. 3 engine broken, three holes blown in the nose

Plexiglas, and a big hunk of flak went into the radio room. A large chunk of flak also came up under the Lt Boyd's seat and demolished his "relief tube." This was no great loss in that the thing usually froze up when the guys tried to use it. Often they went in a can or in their helmet, dumping it out after it had frozen. Another piece of flak flew through the waist window, hitting Sgt Lee, but his flak suit prevented any injury. We touched down at Bassingbourn at 1218 hours and taxied to the hardstand. Bill was done; an exciting finish to a 35-mission tour of flying that had begun back on the 6th of July. The rest of the crew still had two missions to go.

In spite of the damage, Luther had me in flying condition for the next mission on the 17th. Because of the recent repairs, I was designated as a spare, but was not needed. John Henderson flew as 1st pilot with the rest of Bill's crew in No. 202, "Miss Slipstream", on loan from the 322nd. The 19th, John and the rest of the crew took me to Ludwigshafen, flying No. 2 in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. The Mickey equipment went out on the Group Lead plane at the target and it could not drop. The Lead commander decided to go around for another run. As the formation turned, however, the Deputy Lead accidentally dropped its bombs. The rest of the Lead Squadron dropped with the Deputy Lead, as did our Low Squadron.

These bombs fell on the town of Karlsruhe, instead of the target. The Lead plane then jettisoned its bombs east of the target. The High Squadron, seeing that the Lead plane had not dropped on the target, held its bombs. They dropped on a Target of Opportunity, Bad Kreuznach, on the return.

No. 844, "Yankee Gal", with 1Lt Kenneth S. Smith's crew aboard, flying Deputy Lead of our Squadron, took a flak hit over the target setting the No. 3 engine on fire. Lt Smith could not feather the prop and with the fire rather severe, the waist gunner wanted to bail out. Lt Smith told him not over German territory. He then tried diving the plane to put out the fire and pulling up sharply in an attempt to throw off the propeller. Neither worked. With the engine still burning, they headed for an emergency airfield at Brussels. Once there, they found that the 8th Air Force base, A-59, was too crowded with other B-17s who had made emergency landings for them to put down. He then headed for the 9th Air Force base, A-58. Although it had a short runway and was sending up red-red flares warning them not to land, there was no choice but to put "Yankee Gal" down on the field. The ground personnel were most unhappy, but came out with foam and eventually got the fire out. Lt Smith and his crew returned to Bassingbourn the next day. "Yankee Gal" returned several weeks later.

Although the fighter support was very poor and unorganized, we experienced no damage. A

confused mission, but John got me and the crew safely back to Bassingbourn with touchdown at 1645 hours. Their tours of duty completed, the rest of Bill's crew went home. Well done.

Hooper Maplesden Crew

On the 25th of October my next crew took over: pilot, 1Lt Hooper R. Maplesden; copilot, 2Lt Robert N. Hickinbotham; navigator, 2Lt Robert Margolis; bombardier, 2Lt Daniel Haley; top turret gunner/flight engineer, S/Sgt Thayne I. Johnson; radio operator, S/Sgt Lyle B. McCullough; waist gunner, Sgt Robert E. Kananen; ball turret gunner, Sgt Harry P. Hawks; tail gunner, Sgt Frank B. Dermody. They had been flying as a crew since the 19th of September. They flew to Hamm in No. 959, "Rhapsody in Red", in the No. 3 position of the Third Element of our Lead Squadron. Since then they had flown eight missions in five different aircraft. Now I was to be their primary plane. Hooper's crew decided to leave the name and nose art the same. I continued to be "Lady Lois."

Hooper's first mission with me, as Group Deputy Lead, was to the synthetic oil refineries at Hamburg, Wednesday the 25th. The next day we went to the marshalling yards at Munster. On the 30th it was back to the marshalling yards at Hamm. All were routine missions for us. However, the 30th was an eventful day for Lt Cecil G. McConnell's crew of No. 379, "Margie", of the 323rd Squadron. That day 1Lt Edward W. Splawinski was on the loading list as first pilot, in place of Lt McConnell, in the No. 2 position of the Fourth Element of the High Squadron. Lt McConnell was flying as copilot with Capt Sidney R. Maxwell in the Squadron Lead plane, No. 145, "Tailor Maid." He was being checked out as a Lead Pilot. 2Lt Warren T. Smith, the regular copilot on the crew was listed for his usual position. However, Lt Smith did most of the flying, in effect, serving as first pilot.

Immediately after bombs away, "Margie" took a direct hit between Nos. 3 and 4 engines, knocking out No. 4 and reducing power from No. 3. T/Sgt Frank Panek, in the top turret, was hit in the leg tearing away his knee cap and puncturing his lower leg. The oxygen system went out so Lt Smith had to drop "Margie" down to the deck. With loss of power, the crew jettisoned all the guns and excess equipment to lighten the load. As they skimmed over the German country-side, fire from the ground resulted in more damage to the plane. Lts Smith and Splawinski managed to keep "Margie" in the air across the rest of the continent and over the Channel. With insufficient power to clear the radar towers on the Dover cliffs, they had to skirt around them as they flew up the coast towards Bassingbourn. Before reaching Bassingbourn the two remaining engines began to cut out because of

fuel flow problems. They obviously could not reach Bassingbourn, so the pilots headed for Wormingford, a P-51 fighter base. Even though she clipped the trees at the end of the field, they brought "Margie" in for a perfect 3-point landing on the grass. Lts Smith and Splawinski had brought "Margie" and her crew home safely. But, it had been a close call and a scary ride for all.

Thursday, 2 November 1944. A date that was to become forever burned into the memory of everyone stationed at Bassingbourn at that time and to be passed on down to later arriving crews. The target for the day, the Leuna synthetic oil plant at Merseburg, was infamous for its flak barrages. Merseburg was to us what the U-boat pens at St. Nazaire, France had been to the crews of 1943, "Flak City." Luckily, the 324th was stood down the day. We had flown the last three missions; this was our day off. Only our "Mickey Ship", No. 632 flew, as the Group Lead with Cpt James L. Griffin as first pilot. The box barrage of flak was heavy around the target. A number of planes were hit hard after turning on the IP. However, it was after the target that the real damage was done. Because of a supposedly malfunctioning compass, the Group Lead aircraft rallied off the target at 330 degrees west rather than 270 degrees west, as briefed. However, something else, which will never be known, happened in the lead plane that day, resulting in tragic consequences. The rest of the Group followed No. 632, in the process flying out of the protection of the main bomber stream. German Fighter Command had been conserving its scarce fuel for weeks so as to mount a major effort against our bomber attacks. November 2 was that day. In excess of 500 German fighters, mostly FW 190s and Me 109s, came swarming up to meet the Strike Force. They had a field day with the unprotected 91st Group planes.

The 91st sent 36 planes over the continent that day (another had aborted over England); when the last B-17 had touched down at Bassingbourn, seven and one half hours later, 13 were missing. Most of those returning were filled with holes. Down over German territory--from the 322nd: No. 083, "Man O'War II"; No. 012, "Cannon Ball Too"; No. 202, "Miss Slip Stream"; No. 212, "Gal of My Dreams"; No. 298, "White Cargo"; No. 208, "My Baby II." From the 323rd: No. 234, "Bomber Dear"; No. 563, "Winged Victory"; No. 956, "Pard"; No. 984, "Sherries Cherries"; No. 625, "Cheri." From the 401st: No. 883, "Jub-Jub-Bird"; No. 093, "USA The Hard Way." A 35% loss. Thirteen crews missing; 117 of the 333 men who sat down at 0530 hours for the premission breakfast in the combat mess hall that morning would not eat at Bassingbourn again. Forty-nine would never eat breakfast, ever again. One hundred seventeen footlockers to be "sanitized"

and the contents packed and sent home to the families. In the barracks, 117 empty beds with folded mattresses. Out on the field, 13 empty hardstands. Thirteen ground crews standing around silently staring into space, absentmindedly kicking at the loose gravel on the hardstands.

Before the last plane returning from Merseburg had touched down, replacement aircraft and crews started arriving to fill the vacant hardstands on the field and the empty beds in the barracks. The ground crews went about the business of preparing their newly assigned planes for the next mission just as they had the old ones the night before. The missions, and the casualties, would continue. But, the eyes of more than a few ground crew glistened as they did their work. Professionals accustomed to losses, but not without feelings. The flight crews, the planes and the ground crews were family. A lot of the family was gone.

Morale was just as low over in the 457th Bomb Group at Glatton. Owing to a navigational error, the 457th became separated from the bomber stream while in dense clouds before the IP. When they broke into the clear, they were 35 miles north of the briefed route. Fifteen minutes after dropping their bombs in the vicinity of Bernburg, a Target of Opportunity, the Group was pounced upon by about 40 FW 190 German fighters. The fighters attacked in waves of 10 planes abreast. Nine B-17s, seven from the 751st Low Squadron, were lost. The Germans had made clear the consequences of errors that day.

Three days later we were back in the air again. The 91st put up a full complement of 36 planes on a mission to Frankfurt. 1Lt. William V. Laws and his veteran crew flew with me. There was obvious trepidation among the crews at briefing and as they climbed aboard their planes that morning. The old crews remembered their missing friends, the new crews were apprehensive as to what to expect. Since it had the most experienced crews left, the 324th flew Lead Squadron. We flew No. 3 in the Third Element, lifting off at 0719 hours. The Group dropped on the secondary target, the Offenbach marshalling yards, when we found the primary target to be clouded over. Although there was heavy flak over the target and the High Squadron took numerous hits, all planes returned safely. We touched down at 1455 hours with only a few holes. And so our war went on.

On the 6th Hooper and his crew were back aboard for another trip to the synthetic oil refineries at Hamburg. The operations order had us approach the target from upwind so as to improve the bomb pattern. Because of high head winds, the bomb run seemed to take forever, actually eleven minutes. This gave the German anti-aircraft gunners plenty of

time to zero in on us. Fortunately, few planes in the 91st were hit. One that was hit hard was the Group Lead, No. 135, a 324th Mickey plane on loan to the 323rd that day. The pilot was Cpt William E. Reid, flying the second mission of his second tour as a pilot. Maj Willis J. Taylor, the new 323rd Squadron commander, was the Group Lead, flying as copilot for Cpt Reid. Lt. Warren T. Smith, of Lt Cecil McConnell's crew, was flying as tail gunner and formation coordinator. Lt Smith was responsible for keeping Maj Taylor informed of straggling planes, those with engine problems and general condition of the Group formation following them.

No. 135 was hit just before bombs away. An 88 mm burst below the plane took out the No. 3 engine. A second shell went through the right side and exploded in the radio compartment blowing away the left side of the fuselage. The radioman, T/Sgt John N. Cardiff was hit in the abdomen, chest and left arm. The waist gunner, S/Sgt Joseph Uhrick received wounds in the abdomen, right leg, left thigh, and back. Both were killed instantly. A piece of flak smashed into the left leg of the Mickey operator, 1Lt Jordan D. Cannon, causing compound fractures. He survived, but eventually lost his leg. The flight engineer, T/Sgt James R. Kilgallen, was blown from the top turret down into the nose compartment, but was not injured.

With one engine out and a gaping hole in the fuselage, it was obvious No. 135 could not lead the Group home. All radio contact with the Group was out and the Deputy Lead, No. 431, "Cheri II", with 1Lt Arvin O. Basnight's crew aboard, did not understand the hand signals to take over. Each time Cpt Reid attempted to move out of the Lead, the Group followed him. Finally, he simply rolled No. 135 up on one wing and peeled off. So much of the structure of the fuselage had been blown away that when he banked sharply, the plane twisted in the middle. The tail continued to fly level for a few seconds. Eventually, the tail twisted into alignment with the rest of the aircraft.

Cpt Reid asked Maj Taylor if he would go back and see how bad was the situation in the radio room. Maj Taylor said "I can't." He was new to combat and the events were proving unnerving to him. Cpt Reid then asked him to take over the controls while he went back. Cpt Reid saw there was nothing he could do for Sgts Cardiff and Uhrick and that Lt Cannon was being tended to. When he got back to the cockpit, he saw the plane was out of the bomber stream. When he asked where they were going, Maj Taylor answered "to Holland." Cpt Reid told him "Not over Germany, alone." He pointed out that many of the German fighter fields were between them and the nearest Allied field in Holland. Cpt Reid took over the controls and moved back to the safety of the bomber stream and

the fighter escort. P-51 fighters kept flying up alongside No. 135 to get a close look at the gaping hole in her side.

Upon reaching England, Cpt Reid headed for the nearest airfield, Rackheath, which was under repair. Although No. 135 was held together by only a few longitudinal stringers, she remained in one piece when Cpt Reid put her down. When the surviving crew disembarked, they discovered that Lt Smith's chute had been shredded by flak. Had the plane broken up in the air, he would not have survived. A second close call for Lt Smith.

We encountered heavy flak, but took only minor hits. A routine mission for us in spite of the long, slow bomb run.

Thursday, November 9th, we were scheduled for a tactical mission in the vicinity of Metz, France in support of General Patton's 3rd Army. When Hooper ran up the engines prior to take-off, the pressure would not come up in the No. 3 engine supercharger. The crew made a quick switch to a "Spare" from the 401st, No. 610, "Zootie Cutie." Bill Arthur had flown his first two combat missions as copilot in "Zootie Cutie", with 2Lt Carl M. Melton's crew on the 6th and 7th of July.

Hooper took off in time to catch up with the Group and slide into the formation as Lead of the Fourth Element of the Low Squadron. Cloud cover was so heavy over the target area that the 324th made three passes and still could not find the target. The planes had to hold on to their bombs. The 322nd Lead and 323rd High Squadrons were able to drop, but missed their targets badly. The extra flying time had used up so much of the fuel that the 324th planes could not make it back to Bassingbourn with the added weight of the bombs. The Squadron was therefore given permission to land at the Coulommiers Fighter Airfield, about 35 miles from Paris, to be refueled during the night. The crews of the Squadron were divided up amongst the four Fighter Squadrons based at the field for rations and quarters.

Soon after landing, Sgt Johnson ran into an old friend from his cadet school days who was stationed at the airfield. He talked Sgt Johnson into joining him and a couple of his friends in attempting to go into Paris for a night on the town. The guys grabbed some weapons, commandeered a vehicle and headed for Paris. A few miles down the road, they ran into a group of Germans soldiers and French collaborators who started firing at them. In the ensuing fire fight, some of the Germans and French were killed. An American ground unit then joined in the fight and the attackers withdrew. Sgt Johnson's group decided it was best to give up on their night in Paris. Sgt Johnson had the French francs from his survival kit with him so they stopped in a French bar on the way back. A few

minutes later a group of armed Frenchmen wearing parts of American uniforms came in. Fearing they were part the group fighting with the Germans, Sgt Johnson and his buddies left the bar as soon as they could and headed back to the Fighter base.

Each Fighter Squadron had its own club with unlimited supplies of liquor. Most of the crew partook freely of the fighter group's hospitality. This was safer than the local bars and much better than the usual cup of coffee and double shot of bourbon given crews during debriefing at Bassingbourn. All were air-worthy the next morning when it was time to fly home. Hooper and "Zootie Cutie" touched down at 1301 hours. All because of a faulty supercharger, I had missed my only opportunity to spend a night in France.

Luther and his crew got the No. 3 supercharger working in time for a trip back to the Leuna synthetic oil refineries at Merseburg on the 21st. The 91st Group led the 8th Air Force on this mission, with our Squadron CO, Manny Klette, leading the Group, and thus the entire 8th Air Force. We flew Lead of the Third Element of the Lead Squadron. Upon approaching the target the Strike Force encountered very high and dense cloud cover. Other groups turned away to head for alternate targets. Manny had been in radio contact with LTC Allison Brooks, who was leading a scouting force checking on weather over the target. Manny asked Brooks to check for openings in the clouds lower down. He radioed back that there was an opening at 17,000 feet. Upon receiving this information, Manny had the 91st drop down from its briefed bombing altitude of 27,000 feet to 17,000 feet and led the Group under the front. The entire Group dropped on the target. General Doolittle later sent Manny a letter of commendation citing him for his "courage, skill and determination in continuing on under extremely adverse weather conditions." Many of the crewmen did not share in the enthusiasm of General Doolittle. Going over the flak emplacements around Merseburg at 17,000 feet was not conducive to finishing one's 35 missions.

After leaving the target, the formation swung extra wide to the east bringing us within range of the heavy concentration of flak batteries at nearby Leipzig. No. 890, "Fearless Fosdick", with 1Lt Charles C. Whitesell and his crew (who had flown with me to Hamm the 19th of September), was flying as Tail End Charlie of our Lead Squadron. They took a direct hit in the right wing. With the No. 3 engine out, "Fearless Fosdick" went into a steep dive, disintegrating in a fiery explosion almost immediately. Five of the crew, including Lt Whitesell, were able to bail out to become POWs. The flight engineer, T/Sgt Darrell Riley, ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Donald H. Hitzemann, radio operator, T/Sgt John R. Courtney, and waist gunner,

S/Sgt Earl W. Kerch, Jr., went down with the plane. Hooper and his crew had flown in "Fearless Fosdick" to Magdeburg and Munster the 28th and 30th of September

The Deputy Lead of the 401st Low Squadron was No. 545, with 1Lt Harold R. DeBolt at the controls. Just after the target, No. 545 took direct flak hits that knocked out the No. 3 engine. A few seconds later No. 2 was hit, knocking off the nacelle and reducing power from the engine. A bomb had hung up on the drop, but the flak hits caused it to break loose and fall without exploding. With two engines out, the plane could not stay in formation. The crew jettisoned all loose equipment, but still the plane lost altitude. After dropping to 2,000 feet, and with the other two engines losing power, they knew the plane could not stay in the air. Lt DeBolt set the autopilot and everyone bailed out. No. 545 continued on, gradually settling towards the earth in a gentle turn, finally making a perfect belly landing in a plowed field in Allied territory. Troops from a near-by British anti-aircraft gun crew ran to the plane to help the crew out. That no one was aboard gave rise to the rumor of a "ghost ship" that circulated for some time.

No. 144, "Jezebel" of the 401st High Squadron, with 1Lt Neil K. Gehert's crew aboard, was flying in the No. 2 position of the Third Element. The plane was hit by flak with only minor damage to the aircraft. However, one small piece came in on the side of the tail, hitting the tail gunner, S/Sgt Lawrence E. Orcutt, Jr. Although, Sgt Orcutt was wearing a flak suit, the flak entered on his side missing the protected area. The flight engineer, T/Sgt Owen T. Scott, went back to help him, but Sgt Orcutt had died almost immediately. Life or death often was a matter of a fraction of an inch.

1Lt Kenneth S. Smith was flying his last mission that day, as Deputy Lead of our Lead Squadron in No. 887, "Old Battle Ax." He was anxious to get back to Bassingbourn so as to return to the States to get married. However, flak hits over the target punched holes in one of the wing tanks and they were losing fuel. This, combined with strong head winds made it obvious they could not make it back to England. So, once again Lt Smith headed for Brussels. This time the landing strip on A-59 was clear and he landed without incident. Unfortunately, it was three weeks before he could get transportation back to Bassingbourn. After having "visited" Brussels on his 29th mission, Lt Smith decided to wear his dress uniform on his last mission. This was not authorized dress, but he was not so conspicuous while taking in Brussels this time.

1Lt William V. Laws was flying on our left wing in No. 993, "Mah Ideel." "Mah Ideel" took flak hits right after the target that set engine No. 1 on

fire, causing it to stop, and knocked out No. 2. Lt Laws feathered No. 2 and for some reason or other, No. 3 was also feathered. With the fire continuing to burn, Lt Laws put "Mah Ideel" into a steep dive to blow out the fire. This eventually caused the fire to go out. After leveling off, the crew threw out everything that was movable to lighten the ship. No. 3 engine was started up, but with only two good engines, they could not get back into formation. "Mah Ideel" followed us all the way home flying below the formation.

We received several flak hits from the Leipzig batteries. The oxygen system was knocked out, the No. 2 engine feeder and cowl flaps were hit, the hydraulic system punctured, and there was flak in the radio room again. But, we landed safely at 1538 hours. Luther and his crew worked hard the next four days and nights. Everything was working for our next mission, the 25th, another trip to the synthetic oil refineries at Merseburg. This time the flak was meagre and inaccurate and we took no hits. Everyone returned safely.

Sunday, November 26th was another rough day for the 91st. The crews were at breakfast at 0500 hours and were briefed at 0600. Hooper and crew arrived at station at 0730, we taxied at 0830 and lifted off at 0837 hours, forming up No. 2 in the Third Element of the Low Squadron. 2Lt Ralph E. Stoltz, a new first pilot, was copilot. He was flying his third combat introduction mission prior to taking his own crew out. The first part of the mission was relatively routine. Things became more intense as we approached the target, the railway viaduct at Altenbeken.

About 75 German fighters swarmed in on our formation, coming at us mostly from the rear--both in level flight and from below. When the fighters attacked, Sgt McCullough quickly unplugged the electric cord to his heated suit, unhooked from the oxygen supply and went back to man the other waist gun. As he maneuvered around firing at the incoming fighters, his hands became cold and he began to feel weak. He thought it was just the stress from what all was happening. Then, Sgt Kananen gave him a kick and motioned to his chest. In all the excitement Sgt McCullough had forgotten to plug in his electric cord and oxygen line. He was about to pass out from the lack of oxygen. Plugged in, his hands warmed up and his head cleared as he continued to man the waist gun.

Five minutes before the IP, No. 913, "Seattle Sleeper", piloted by 1Lt John R. Stevens, flying No. 3 in the Second Element of the 323rd High Squadron was hit by cannon fire from the fighters. This started a fire in the right wing close to the fuselage and severed the aileron controls, causing her to fall slowly out of the formation. The fire continued to burn, spreading to most of the wing. "Seattle

Sleeper" dropped lower and headed for the North Sea and England. However, it soon became obvious they could not make it to the North Sea. The crew bailed out, near Haulerwijk, Holland, just before she exploded. Five of the crew reached the Dutch underground and evaded capture until liberated by Canadian ground forces in April 1945. The remaining four crewmen became POWs.

At almost the same time "Seattle Sleeper" was hit, No. 515, "The Wild Hare", piloted by 1Lt Robert J. Flint, flying Tail End Charlie in our Low Squadron, was also hit in the right wing and No. 3 engine by fighter cannon fire. The engine caught on fire causing her to lose altitude and drop behind the formation. "The Wild Hare" nosed over and exploded, breaking into two pieces. Only four of her crew managed to parachute out safely, to become POWs--Lt Flint; copilot, 2Lt David L. Bishop, a first pilot flying his third combat familiarization mission; navigator, F/O Robert J. Miller; waist gunner, Sgt Glenn P. Lynch. Bill Arthur's crew had flown their first mission with the 324th in "The Wild Hare" back on the 24th of August. Hooper had flown in "The Wild Hare" for his first combat mission, as copilot in 1Lt Philip L. Collins' crew, to Heligoland the 27th of August and then with his own crew to Mainz the 21st of September and Cologne the 27th.

Between the IP and the target, No. 128, "Dear Becky", piloted by 2Lt Adolph P. Miller, flying in the No. 2 position in the Second Element in our Low Squadron was hit in the No. 2 engine by 20 mm fighter cannon fire. Although the engine caught fire, "Dear Becky" stayed in formation for another two minutes. The crew bailed out just before she exploded, completely disintegrating. All survived to become POWs, except for the copilot, 2Lt Richard E. Prunty. Hooper had flown in "Dear Becky" as copilot on his second combat mission, to Kiel August 30th, and as first pilot with his regular crew to Schweinfurt the 9th of October. It was "Dear Becky" that almost swerved into us over Ludwigshaven the 8th of September when Lt Beasley was hit in the head by flak and knocked onto the controls.

One other plane, No. 311, "Terry's Tiger", (the nickname of the 91st Group, after the Commanding Officer, Col Terry), did not make it back to Bassingbourn that day. She was flown by 1Lt Thomas Martin, Hooper's roommate, and his crew in the No. 3 position in the Second Element of our Low Squadron. 2Lt George F. Miller, a first pilot, flying his first combat familiarization mission was copilot. "Terry's Tiger" was hit by fighter cannon fire well before the target, setting the No. 3 engine afire and knocking out the ball turret and the intercom, as well as causing the No. 1 propeller to run away. Lt Martin feathered the No. 1 engine and headed the falling "Terry's Tiger" towards Allied-

controlled France. The bomb load was jettisoned into the Zuider Zee, along with the ball turret and all loose equipment. Still the aircraft lost altitude and was hit in the No. 4 engine by ground fire. With only one engine, Lt Martin made a straight run for the emergency fighter airfield A-83 at Denain/Prouvy, France.

The fire in No. 3 engine left very little power for the aircraft to make a normal approach. Ahead and to the right were houses, to the left, factories. P-38s were scattered all over the field. Lt Martin saw a space between the fighters barely wide enough for "Terry's Tiger" to thread through and headed for it, coming in a little high. The area around the air base had just been liberated from the Germans. Since it was Sunday, a number of civilians from near-by villages were wandering around looking at the new American planes. Unfortunately, just as "Terry's Tiger" touched down, a French woman with her two small children in her hands ran into the path of the plane and were killed. There are no exemptions from death in war, even on a Sunday afternoon outing. "Terry's Tiger" was declared salvage on the 11th of December.

No. 069, "Round Trip Topsy", Bill Arthur's plane while he was in the 401st Squadron, on loan to the 323rd Squadron for this mission, was flown by 1Lt Warren T. Smith, this time flying as first pilot. They flew in the No. 3 position of the Third Element of the High Squadron. About half an hour before the target, "Topsy" took a number of 20 mm cannon hits that damaged the No. 2 engine, caught the left wing on fire, shredded the tail surfaces, cut off oxygen to the rear of the plane, knocked out much of the instrument panel, jammed the ball turret and tail guns, and sprung the bomb bay doors open. In spite of all this, "Topsy" continued on to the target. However, the bomb releases were jammed and the bombs would not drop. S/Sgt James L. Matthews, the togglier, was finally able to jettison the bombs on the way back by tugging and kicking at the shackles.

For three hours the crew fought the fire, but she continued to burn, eventually taking out the No. 2 engine, causing Round Trip Topsy to start losing altitude. Still, "Topsy" was flying and the fires did not seem to be spreading. Lt Smith followed at a safe distance behind the formation so as not to take out any other planes should they blow up. Over the Channel they picked up an escort from a flight of P-47s. When they reached England, Lt Smith headed for the first landing field he could find, barely making it to the 56th Fighter Group base at Halesworth. The windshield was iced over and a landing flap was jammed, causing "Topsy" to swerve off the runway and pile into two trucks and a concrete mixer. "Topsy" immediately became a flaming inferno. The crew scrambled out safely. In a few minutes, only the tips of the wings were left.

But, Lt Smith had brought his crew home safely again. This was Lt Smith's third close call. For his action that day, Lt Smith was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

In spite of all the flak, our trip was relatively routine. We dropped all six of our 1,000 pounders on target and had no serious damage. There were just a few small holes when we landed at 1430 hours.

After the mission of 26 November, Lt Smith went to the 323rd Squadron Operations Officer, Maj William E. Reid, and told him he did not want to fly as first pilot any more. He said his missions as first pilot had been rough and he wanted to fly only as copilot. After some discussion, Lt Smith finally admitted that he had the premonition he was going to be killed and did not want to take any of his friends with him. Lt Smith requested that he be assigned to fly as copilot with new crews arriving at Bassingbourn. Maj Reid told him he could not break up new crews by honoring his request. This would be bad for the morale of crews who had trained together. Maj Reid gave Lt Smith a three-day pass to go to London with a friend to get his mind off himself. He was back the next day wanting to fly. Maj Reid then offered to let Lt Smith fly as his copilot or as tail gunner and formation coordinator when he was flying Group Lead. Or, he would allow him to cut short his combat tour and return home. Even though Lt Smith had a wife, Virginia, and a daughter, Sally, back in Rapid City, South Dakota and emotionally was extremely attached to his family, he refused to be relieved of flying before finishing his tour. When Lt McConnell heard of what was being discussed, he asked Lt Smith fly as his copilot. Lt McConnell said he would pass up being a Lead pilot, if Lt Smith would stay on as his copilot. Lt Smith finally agreed to this and went back to flying with his original crew.

On Monday, the 27th of November I was loaned to 1Lt Neil K. Gehret and his crew of the 401st Squadron. We flew in the No. 2 position of the Third Element of the Lead Squadron to the marshalling yards at Offenbourg. Wednesday, the 29th, I was back with the 324th. Hooper and his crew flew with me to the synthetic oil refineries at Misburg. Both were easy missions.

On the 30th of November Hooper and his crew were aboard once more. A new first pilot, 2Lt Joseph A. Bartush, flew as copilot for his introduction to combat flying. Lt. Hickinbotham flew as copilot for 2Lt William Auth in No. 596, "Sweet Dish." The 324th was the High Squadron; we flew No. 3 in the Second Element. Near us on the taxiway that morning was a new silver plane, No. 936, that had come in to Bassingbourn the day before. The ground crew had worked all night to

prepare her for today's mission to the synthetic oil plant at Zeitz. Cpt Iver O. Tufty was her pilot.

Flak that day was only moderate, but very accurate. As we approached the target, No. 936 was hit, wounding Cpt Tufty, the copilot, 2Lt Arthur R. Bart, and the tail gunner, S/Sgt Joseph M. Albury. Cpt Tufty had a deep wound in the back of his leg. Lt Bart was hit in the front of the right leg and his ankle was shattered. Lt Bart was taken down into the nose to stabilize his leg. Although bleeding badly, Cpt Tufty remained at the controls. Only after they were out of the major flak concentrations would Cpt Tufty allow the crew to put a tourniquet on his leg. The No. 1 and 2 engines were knocked out and the plane was losing altitude rapidly. The crew tossed out all the removable equipment, but the plane kept going down. As they approached the cloud cover at about 4,000 ft, Cpt Tufty said they would have to bail out if they went into the clouds. Unfortunately, in their haste to prepare the plane for the mission the ground crew had forgotten to include the tools needed to release the ball turret. In some manner or other, the crew was able to pry it loose using a couple of pliers and the .50 caliber machine gun barrels. After the ball turret fell away, No. 936 leveled off. But, Cpt Tufty was able to get No. 936 only as far as Belgium, where he landed at an advanced airbase south of Louvain. On landing, there were no brakes and the plane ran off the runway, the left wheel dropping into a bomb crater causing the wing to hit the ground and buckle. Cpt Tufty got his crew down safely. It was the last time Cpt Tufty would fly. No. 936 was not ready to fly again until 22 March.

No. 742, on loan from the 322nd for this mission, was flown by 2Lt Ralph E. Stoltz and his crew. Lt Stoltz had been our copilot just four days earlier. This was their first mission together as a crew. They were flying No. 3 in the Third Element of our Low Squadron. We were flying across from them as No. 3 in the Second Element. Two minutes after the target, No. 742 took a direct hit. She fell out of the formation and exploded, completely disintegrating, scattering wreckage over several miles. Only the navigator, 2Lt George A. Minich, was blown free to survive as a POW.

Despite the accurate flak, we received no hits and dropped our bomb load, twenty 250 pound general purpose bombs on the target. The trip home was uneventful, with touch-down at 1743 hours.

Saturday night, December 1st, was "party time" once again for the crews of the 91st. The "Take It Easy" USO Show was at Bassingbourn for a performance. East Anglia was soaked in and the Group was stood down for the next three days because of the foul weather conditions. The pressure of flying combat was off temporarily so the

crews could kick back and enjoy the show. However, girls were not brought in this time. This was simply "take a rest and enjoy a break from flying" time.

Tuesday, the 4th of December, it was back to business, the marshalling yards at Kassel. 1Lt Norman Kimmel and crew flew with me that day while Hooper's crew was given a break from flying. A milk run. The next day the Group went to Berlin. The 324th was stood down for that mission. I was preflighted and loaded as a Spare, but was not needed, thus, missing my second chance to fly to Berlin. The 322nd, flying as High Squadron, put up 12 planes; three failed to return--No. 234, "Easy Does It"; No. 360, "Bride of Mars"; and No. 693. No. 596, "Sweet Dish", flown by F/O Robert W. Roach's crew, made it back, but was hit so badly over the target that the crew thought she was going down. Three--navigator, F/O George Alexander, togglier, Sgt Elden Larsen, and flight engineer, Sgt Robert H. Faulkner, bailed out to become POWs. On Saturday, the 9th, Hooper and his crew were aboard as we went to the marshalling yards at Stuttgart, followed by a trip to more marshalling yards at Frankfurt the next Monday and once again to the Leuna synthetic oil refineries at Merseburg on Tuesday, the 12th. All three were routine missions, including, uncharacteristically, Merseburg.

Only the 324th Squadron went up the 18th. The mission was to provide a screening by dropping aluminum foil strips, "chaff", over Luxembourg to confuse German radar directed at tactical bomber strikes by the rest of the 1st and the 3rd Air Divisions against German ground troops fighting in the Battle of the Bulge. I was designated as a Spare, but did not fly. Hooper and his crew flew in No. 174.

On the 24th the 8th Air Force gave the Germans a memorable Christmas Eve present. The largest number of heavy bombers ever put up on a single day during the war was sent out, 1,884 of which made it to their targets over the continent. While we were taxiing to the runway, the No. 3 engine magneto failed, necessitating a return to the hardstand and a quick switch to a Spare, No. 083, "Happy Valley Express", from the 323rd (who happened to have the same last three digits in her serial number as had "Man-O War II"). They took off at 1122 hours, an hour and 17 minutes behind schedule, but were in formation at 1154. As per his usual routine, Hooper had placed his oxygen mask in the rigging next to his seat as he was going through the preflight checks. In the mad scramble to move to "Happy Valley Express", you guessed it, he forgot to grab his mask. Hooper flew the entire mission sucking on the oxygen tube itself-- kind of hard on his throat, but he made it through the mission OK.

Upon arriving back in England, the 91st found that Bassingbourn was "socked in" so badly the planes had to divert to the 94th Bomb Group base at Bury St Edmonds. Because of the large number of extra personnel, there was no room for them in the limited base billeting. The crews ate C-rations for their evening meal and spent the night in their planes. A very cold and an unforgettable Christmas Eve for the crewmen. The next morning the crews were trucked back to Bassingbourn for a Christmas Day meal. Skeleton crews went back to Bury St Edmonds the day after Christmas to fly the planes home.

Our next mission was Thursday, December 28th, to the Ludendorf railroad bridge over the Rhine at Remagen. This time all engines checked out and we took off on schedule at 0934 hours. At 0955, while still circling upward to form up, Hooper noticed a little flame flickering from No. 1 engine. Normally, this would have meant an abort. Since this promised to be a short, easy mission, Hooper and the crew didn't want to miss it. Hooper circled the base as they watched the fire awhile. To be on the safe side, Hooper told the crew to be ready to bail out. Lt Haley went aft to help the rear crew with their chutes. Sgt Johnson stayed with the pilots to assist in determining what to do about the fire. The four enlisted men lined up at the side fuselage door, with Lt Haley in the rear, as he felt he should as an officer. Sgt Kananen was trying to read the instructions on how to open the door, but with little success. Finally, Lt Haley went to the front of the line to get the door ready to open.

In the mean time the fire didn't seem to be growing so Hooper opened the cowl flaps hoping to blow it out. That didn't work. He next tried shutting off the gas to the engine and diving downward letting the prop windmill to suck all the fuel out of the system. In a few minutes, at 1025 hours, the fire went out. Hooper then cautiously restarted the engine as he continued to circle the base; the fire did not reappear. The crew went back to their flight positions. At 1118, under full power, we headed for the coast, caught up with the Group, moved into our assigned space as Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron, and completed the mission. Kind of scary, but we lucked out. Apparently gas was dripping onto a magneto, causing the fire. Not certain why it started or why it stopped leaking. Luther checked out the gas lines as OK that night.

After we completed the bomb run, Lt Haley found that the bomb bay doors would not come up. After working at them for some time, he decided to hit the salvo switch, which frequently would break loose any ice jamming the doors. He asked Sgt McCullough to stick his head out of the radio

compartment and check the bays for any hung-up bombs. When told the racks were clear, Lt Haley hit the switch. And, out fell one of the two 1,000 pounders we had carried! It had hung up when the others dropped. Lt Haley assumed Sgt McCullough had not actually looked into the bomb bays. When the bomb fell away we were over Allied territory. The navigators on the other planes dutifully recorded the event and location. Apparently no one on the ground was hit. However, Manny Klette was most upset when we got back. He threatened to make Lt Haley "walk the perimeter" of the base, but never did.

The Group missed the bridge, hitting only the access roads. I hesitate to think how many men would have been killed later had we done our job that day. By missing the target, the bridge was still there for the ground troops to use in establishing a beachhead across the Rhine in March 1945.

On the 29th, the 324th was scheduled to fly in a Composite Group, but the mission was scrubbed. The other three squadrons flew to Wittlich. The 324th went up again on the 31st, to Bitburg. Hooper and his crew flew once again in No. 083, "Happy Valley Express." I was designated a Deputy Spare, but was not needed.

We started off the New Year of 1945 with a scheduled flight to the oil refineries at Merseburg on January 1st, but diverted to Kassel when we found Merseburg clouded over. No. 911, "Heats On", of the 401st Squadron, on her 92nd mission and flown by 1Lt Earl J. Jeffers, had an engine fail on take-off. Lt Jeffers tried to put her down on the nearby 355th Fighter Group base at Steeple Morden, the main runway of which was directly in the flight path from runway 25 at Bassingbourn. Back on the 6th of March 1944, 2Lt Walter Wildinon in No. 761, "Blue Dreams", had made a similar emergency landing at Steeple Morden. Although the crew forgot to lower the landing gear and completely wrecked the aircraft, no one in "Blue Dreams" or on the ground was injured. But, as "Heats On" touched down, for some unknown reason she careened into a P-51 dispersal area, striking parked aircraft and exploded, killing all 9 of the crew aboard. There are all sorts of ways to die in an air war. Several of the fighter base ground crew members were seriously injured, but none was killed. For us the mission was uneventful. A newly arrived first pilot, 2Lt H. John Madsen, flew with us as copilot. It was his first combat mission.

Then followed routine missions to the communications center and rail yards at Prum on the 2nd of January and the marshalling yards at Coblenz the 5th. Milk runs. Saturday, the 6th, we headed for the Deutz Road suspension bridge over the Rhine at Cologne. We flew Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron. On the way over we

saw our first V-2 rockets, two of them headed for London; the last one was in the air near Aachen. Owing to heavy cloud cover over the primary target, we diverted to the marshalling yards within the city.

1Lt Cecil G. McConnell's crew from the 323rd Squadron was Group Deputy Lead. They were flying in No. 501, "Jeanie", a 379th Bomb Group "Mickey Plane" on loan to the 91st for the day. 2Lt Warren T. Smith flew as copilot, only his fourth mission after refusing the offer to return home to his family. The Group Lead for that day was Maj William O. Reid, by now CO of the 323rd Squadron. It was Maj Reid's policy when returning from the target to follow the Group ahead in file, so as to observe and try to avoid any flak coming up at the bomber stream.

On that mission there was only very light and scattered anti-aircraft fire so he took no evasive action. Ten minutes beyond the target four isolated bursts occurred within the 91st Group formation. Unfortunately, the second one hit "Jeanie" in the right wing setting it on fire and throwing the plane into a slow flat downward spin. No. 3 engine also became engulfed in fire and the crew began bailing out. Lt Smith was hit by flak fragments and slumped down over the control column. Lt McConnell put the plane on autopilot and picked Lt Smith up under his arms and dragged him to the nose escape hatch. Lt Smith came to in time for both of them to bail out of the burning plane. The navigator, F/O Donald E. Williams, bombardier, 2Lt Alan G. Hillman, and flight engineer, T/Sgt George G. Turner, were killed in the air. The following day Lt Smith, died of his wounds in a German hospital. He would not return to Rapid City and to Virginia and Sally.

No. 880, "Little Miss Mischief", flown the 6th by 1Lt Herman W. Balaban's crew was on our left wing. She was hit hard by flak just before bombs away. The first burst hit in an inboard engine then an outboard engine was hit. The first engine disintegrated and the other one soon started overheating. Just as we left the target, "Little Miss Mischief" started falling behind the formation. She dropped lower and Lt Balaban saw they could not make it back to England. The navigator, 1Lt Otto J. Krause, told him there was an airfield at Merville, France, so they headed for the field and landed with no additional damage. "Little Miss Mischief" remained at Merville for repairs. She returned to Bassingbourn the 26th of February.

1Lt Tom Martin's crew was flying in No. 151, "Shure Shot", as Lead of the Third Element of our Low Squadron. Before reaching the target, "Shure Shot" started spewing oil from three of her engines and had to turn back with the bombs still aboard. Lt Martin headed for an emergency air strip at Denain-Prouvy, France. Because of the poor

condition of the field, they had to make a wheels-up landing. As "Shure Shot" skidded to a halt, she broke almost in half. However, none of the crew was hurt--just shaken. They returned to home three days later. "Shure Shot" was eventually restored to flying condition, but did not return to Bassingbourn until March 13th.

Our next mission was to the airfield at Ostheim on the 10th of January. Visibility was very bad as we took off at 0903 hours. We circled Bassingbourn until 1050 before being able to form up the Group. Once we got into our assigned position, Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron, the mission was a quiet one for us. Even with the problems of forming up, we got to the target ahead of schedule, thus missing contact with our fighter support. Fortunately, the Luftwaffe was not up that day.

No. 988, "The B.T.O.", flying on our right wing was unable to drop on the target and held onto her bombs. Shortly after leaving the target, "B.T.O." experienced engine failure. Unable to maintain flying speed, the pilot, 2Lt John Martin had to put her down at Evere Airfield, B-58, at Brussels. Visibility was also extremely poor over Belgium and he overshot the runway, hit a C-47 and careened into a hanger. In the ensuing fire the bombs exploded, destroying "The B.T.O.", the hanger and several British aircraft. The ball turret and tail gunners, S/Sgts Woodrow R. Cornett and Howard C. Broadus, were killed in the landing.

We saw two B-17s from another Group go down, one spinning out of control; no chutes. The other fell away with the left wing and No. 1 and 2 engines afire; one chute. Two B-17s from the 379th Group collided over the target; one had most of its tail cut off, but continued on a level flight for about 15 minutes before spinning down out of control. Both eventually went down; one chute.

Monday January 15th was an interesting day. Although another routine mission to the marshalling yards at Ingolstadt, it was not a routine mission for Hooper. This was his 35th, and last, mission. We flew Lead of the Third Element of the Lead Squadron. As soon as we took off, Lt Margolis saw the Indicated Air Speed gauge was not working. You have to know your air speed to navigate. A quick look out the left side cheek gun window revealed the problem. The canvas cover was still on the pitot tube, into which the air flows to give the air speed. Since this was Hooper's last mission, they did not want to abort what was to be an easy one. Sgt Johnson came down from the top turret and with a wrench broke out a piece of the Plexiglas in the rear of the cheek gun bubble. He simply reached out and flicked the cover off the pitot tube. Then he wedged the Plexiglas back in place and we were in business. The rest of the mission was uneventful.

We saw another V-2 on its way to England at 1040 hours. Touch down at Bassingbourn was 1557 hours and the war was over for Hooper.

Hooper, a quiet, reserved, no nonsense, fly-it-by-the-book, highly proficient pilot had taken me into some tight situations, and brought me home safely 21 times. The rest of the crew finished out their missions flying as fill-ins in different crews.

John Madsen Crew

The next crew assigned to me was that of 2Lt H. John Madsen. John had flown his first combat mission as copilot with Hooper on our mission to Kassel on the 1st. The rest of his crew included: copilot, 2Lt David Bullen; navigator, F/O Irvin W. Cannon; bombardier, 2Lt Robert J. Starr; top turret gunner/flight engineer, Sgt Boyd A. Weems; radio operator, Sgt Fred Ward; waist gunner, Sgt Everett R. Ayres; ball turret gunner, Sgt Andrew M. Schumacher; tail gunner, S/Sgt Charles L. Coon. Sgt Coon had flown 50 missions with the 15th Air Force in Italy, returned to the States, became restless and volunteered for another tour. The Madsen crew had flown only one mission together, the 10th of January in No. 623, to Ostheim.

While discussing my special quirks with John and his crew, Luther asked if he might change my name to that of his 4-year old daughter, Jean. Jean and her mother were living with the Grandparents back in Melroy, Pennsylvania. The crew had no special name in mind so told him to go ahead. Luther had Tony Starcer leave the nose art of "Lady Lois" in place and paint the new name, "Little Jean", in medieval script. I was the second plane in the 324th Squadron to carry this name. The first "Little Jean", No. 230, had been shot down 11 January 1944 over Oschersleben, on her second mission and before her name was painted on the nose. Only four of 2Lt Allan A. Uskela's crew (copilot, 2Lt Gilbert R. Helms; navigator, 2Lt G. William Potter; bombardier, 2Lt Robert G. Morgan; flight engineer, Sgt Bernard D. Offley) survived to become POWs.

John's first mission with me, to the marshalling yards at Paderborn, on the 17th of January, was an easy one. Although No. 4 engine ran rough the entire mission, we were able to maintain our place in the formation, No. 2 of the Second Element of the High Squadron. The next mission, on Saturday the 20th, was to the Mannheim railroad bridge over the Rhine at Ludwigshaven. Routine. Sunday, the 324th stood down, but I was designated as a Spare. When 1Lt Earl W. Scofield, of the 323rd, found his assigned plane, No. 083, "Happy Valley Express", was not up to the mission, he and his crew switched over to me. Lt Scofield had been copilot on "Round Trip Topsy" when Lt Smith crash landed her at Halesworth. On the 24th of December

"Happy Valley Express" had filled in for me when I could not fly. I was now able to return the favor. We took off at 0832 hours, caught up with the formation and flew to the marshalling yards at Aschaffenburg as No. 3 in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. Another milk run.

John and his crew were back aboard the next day, the 22nd, when we went to the Holten synthetic oil plant at Sterkrade. We took off at 1031 hours and moved into the No. 2 position in the Second Element of the Lead Squadron. Flak over the target was intense, a lot of red bursts. One 88 shell entered behind the left waist window, exiting through the tail and vertical fin. It left a gaping 18 inch hole in the waist and a two foot hole in the fuselage and tail fin. The shell also broke loose the radio beacon marker box in the rear of the fuselage. The box went flying forward, hitting Sgt Ayers on the ankle causing a bad bruise, but no wound. Sgt Ayers yelled out over the intercom that he had been hit. Sgt Schumacher thought it sounded bad so he rotated the ball turret to where he could come up into the plane. When he did, Sgt Ayers was sitting on the floor laughing at what had happened. Flak tore out all the control cables on the left side and two cables on the right side as well as cutting the hydraulic lines. There were other holes, one in the ball turret only an inch from Sgt Schumacher's rear end. In spite of all the damage to the controls and hydraulic system, John put me down on the runway at 1455 hours as if a routine landing. But, it would be almost two weeks before I would fly again--a lot of repairs and a lot work for Luther and his crew.

No. 083, "Happy Valley Express" was back in the air on this mission, with 1Lt Nelson D. Van Blarcom as pilot, flying in the No. 2 position in the Second Element of the 322nd Low Squadron. She was hit over the target, knocking out the No. 3 and 4 engines and most of the electrical system and setting the right wing on fire. The flight engineer, S/Sgt Clare E. Stanbury, cut a hole through the bomb bay wall into the wing and got the fire out by emptying an extinguisher into the cavity. They tossed out all loose equipment and jettisoned the ball turret. Still Lt Van Blarcom could not make it back to Bassingbourn. They limped back as far as the isolated clandestine operations air base at Metfield where they crash-landed. "Happy Valley Express" was salvage. An old friend gone. She had flown 49 missions.

February 3rd. Berlin! My first trip to "Big B." The red line ran to Berlin when the curtain was pulled back at the 0435 hours briefing. This mission, the fifteenth to Berlin and the first the 8th Air Force had flown there in two months, was to provide support for the Russian Army, which had just crossed the Oder River and was approaching to within less than 40 miles of the German capital. The

German 6th Panzer Army was deploying to the Eastern Front. We were to disrupt its trains as they passed through Berlin by knocking out the rail yards.

The mission originally had been scheduled for the 2nd, but owing to heavy cloud cover over the city, had been scrubbed. Since the foul weather promised to continue for several days, some of the crews were given passes to go off base. Manny Klette, who was to lead the Group, was given permission to go to London to see his girlfriend. Shortly after he left Bassingbourn, word came down that the clouds over the target had dissipated and the mission was back on for the 3rd. The 324th was the Lead Squadron.

LTC Marvin D. Lord, the Group Operations Officer, who had transferred to Group from the 401st Squadron the 1st of December, volunteered to lead the Group. LTC Lord earlier had transferred to the 401st Squadron from the 381st Bomb Group at Ridgewell, where he had flown his 25 missions. However, he had not yet been to Berlin and was eager to Lead. The Lead plane, No. 632 of our Squadron, was the same one in which Lt Lowe and Sgt Pitts had been wounded on 8 September and that had survived as Lead of the 2 November Merseburg mission. On the 3rd of February No. 632 was flown by 1Lt Frank L. Adams with LTC Lord in the copilot's seat. The rest of the crew consisted of Manny's experienced lead crew. The radio operator, T/Sgt J. P. Holbrook had flown 78 missions, the engineer, T/Sgt David C. McCall, 80 and the waist gunner, T/Sgt George R. Zenz, 104. The bombardier, Nando, "Tony", Cavalieri, had been promoted to captain, effective that morning.

I was flown by John's crew. The crews were at their stations at 0620 hours. We started engines at 0650, taxied at 0655, lifted off at 0716 hours and formed up as No. 3 in the Fourth Element, Tail End Charlie, a bad place to be over Berlin. At 1045 hours, about half an hour before the target, two B-17s, No. 697 and No. 387, "Maude n' Maria", from the 398th Group directly ahead of us collided. Both broke in two and fell. Only three of the eighteen crewmen on board the two aircraft survived.

As expected, flak over the target was especially intense. Lots of red bursts all around us. Immediately after bombs away, No. 632 took a direct hit amidships and broke apart in front of the radio operator's position. The front end dropped away and exploded throwing debris and crew all over the sky, the main wreckage falling onto Bellevue-Allee in the Tiergarten near the Brandenburg Gate. The rear portion sailed along as if in formation for a few seconds, slowly tipping over before spinning downward. Sgt Holbrook was slumped over his table, apparently already dead. The "Mickey" operator, Cpt Norman L. Whelan,

slowly slid out into space. No parachute--25,000 ft down. Four chutes appeared from the plane. That of the tail gunner, 2Lt Donald J. Shoemaker, a pilot who was flying as the formation coordinator, became entangled in the tail section and was pulled down with it. None of the others survived in the holocaust that was below.

No. 085, "Yankee Belle", flying on the left wing of the Lead, was hit at almost the same instant as was No. 632, by flak and a piece or two of debris from No. 632. The No. 3 and 4 engines were knocked out and No. 2 was not pulling full power. All the control cables, except for those to the elevators, were severed. The first pilot, 1Lt George F. Miller, (who had been copilot with Lt Tom Martin when they crash-landed "Terry's Tiger" in France on the 26th of November) and the copilot, 2Lt Walter V. Marxmeyer, put "Yankee Belle" into a dive to attain extra speed so as to keep from spinning out. They also engaged the autopilot aileron and rudder controls, while using the regular controls for the elevators, to get more control of the plane. The pilots were able to feather No. 2 and 4 and the prop spun off No. 3. Even though the crew tossed out all loose equipment, "Yankee Belle" was losing 500 ft per minute. By this time the plane was too low for the crew to bail out. Although they had been briefed to head for Russian lines in such a situation, Lt Miller did not think it wise to cross the German-Russian front lines at so low an altitude. He asked the navigator, F/O Asay R. Johnson, plot a course to Sweden. But, she was too badly damaged even to make it there. The pilots crash-landed "Yankee Belle" in a large muddy farm field near the small village of Demmin, about 20 km south of Altentreptow. All the crew survived to become POWs.

Four minutes after bombs away, No. 873, "The Joker II", of the following 381st Group, with 2Lt John B. Anderson's crew aboard, dropped out of the formation, went down in a spin and exploded. Lt Anderson was killed. The rest of the crew survived as POWs. All told, 27 B-17s from all Groups operational that day went down. Although we flew Tail End Charlie, there were only three flak holes when we touched down at Bassingbourn at 1510 hours.

There then followed rather routine missions to the marshalling yards at Gotha on the 6th and to Dresden on the 15th. The latter was the secondary target when we found the oil refineries at Ruhland to be clouded over. A British raid of the night of February 13-14th had created a horrendous fire storm that almost completely reduced the center of Dresden to ashes. There was not much left for us to lay waste to. For the first time there was expressed displeasure on the part of the crews regarding their target. We had dropped on the center of the city.

Many were upset at bombing a purely civilian target. We were tasked for strategic strikes at industrial and military targets. The idea of bombing civilians went against their sense of morality, even in a total war.

The next day, Friday the 16th, we went to the Benzol Plant at Gelsenkirchen. Flak was very heavy over the target, but no one was lost from the 91st and I had only a few small holes. I was back in the air the 19th, this time flown by 1Lt Theodore N. Santos and his crew as Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron to the synthetic oil works at Dortmund. Another milk run. The next day the 324th stood down. I was loaned to the 401st and flown by 2Lt Richard I. Edwards' crew in the No. 3 position in the Third Element of the Lead Squadron. Except for the flight engineer, T/Sgt George R. Simons, who was on his 35th and final mission, Lt Edwards' crew was new. The target was the marshalling yards at Nurnberg.

German fighters were not up that day, but the flak over Nurnberg was especially intense. No. 490, "Wicked Witch", flown by 1Lt Eddie R. McKnight of the 323rd as Lead of the Third Element of the Low Squadron, took a hit just below the pilots compartment as they passed over the target. The ensuing explosion caused a fire that poured from the copilot's side of the plane. As "Wicked Witch" fell away, an explosion was seen to erupt in the bomb bays. Only the copilot, 2Lt Milton C. Rohr, navigator, 2Lt Peter M. Chamberlain, and tail gunner, Sgt Elmer B. Russell, survived.

A flak hit before the target caused two of our six 500 pound general purpose bombs to hang up in the bomb bay when we dropped. Sgt Simons went down to kick them free. When the first fell free the bombardier, F/O Charles S. Perlman, assumed they both had dropped and began closing the doors. The armed second bomb barely cleared the closing doors. We took additional flak hits over the target that shot out the elevator cables making it difficult to land. Lt Edwards waited until all the other planes were down before coming in, touching down at 1639 hours. A good job of landing.

Luther had everything back in order for John and his crew Monday, the 26th, for our second trip to Berlin. As before, the 324th was the Lead Squadron. Manny Klette was in the Lead plane, No. 651, "Lorraine", flown by Cpt Weldon L. Brubaker. This time we flew No. 3 in the Second Element. Again, we hit railroad yards. Heavy flak, as expected, but no damage to us and no losses from the 91st. Next day it was marshalling yards at Leipzig where the flak was also intense. The No. 3 engine supercharger went out before the target, but we were able to maintain our position in the formation through the bomb run. We could not keep up with the formation after the target,

however, and left the formation at 1415 hours to return alone. Lt Starr, who was acting as navigator on this mission, plotted a more direct route to Bassingbourn. Fortunately, there were no German fighters in the air and we touched down safely at 1730 hours, about 45 minutes before the rest of the Group arrived.

The next mission, 2nd of March, 2Lt John Martin's crew (who had crash-landed "The B.T.O." in Brussels, the 10th of January) was aboard. We started for the synthetic oil refinery at Bohlen, but the target was clouded over so we went on to the marshalling yards at Chemnitz. Routine. John Madsen and crew were back with me on the 4th to fly to marshalling yards at Reutlingen after finding the primary target, the Klickner Humbolt factory at Ulm, clouded over. Next, it was to the Agust Victoria benzyl refineries at Racklinghausen on the 8th, and marshalling yards at Kassel the 9th. Heavy flak over the latter target, but only a few small holes. Then, it was to marshalling yards and railway works at Sinsen on the 10th, the bridge over the Weser River at Vlotho the 14th, and marshalling yards at Oranienburg the 15th of March. Although not very heavy, the flak was accurate over the latter target. A nearby B-17, No. 562, "Katy", from the 398th Group was hit and went down.

The 19th we dropped our bomb load, ten 500 pounders, on the city of Plauen, when the primary target, the synthetic oil refineries at Bohlen, was found to be clouded over. Two days later it was to the Me 262 jet fighter air field at Rheine/Salzbergen. Both were easy missions. Four Me 163, "Comet", rocket fighter aircraft made a run at the formation over Rheine, but with no ill effects. On the 22nd, Dave Bullen moved over to the left seat for a mission to hit military encampments at Dorsten; 2Lt Philip J. Pulgiese flew copilot. Nothing unusual happened to us.

No. 806 of the 323rd, with 2Lt Matthew J. Templeton's crew aboard, was flying in the No. 2 position of the Second Element of the High Squadron. Just at "bombs away" a shell burst directly in front of the right wing, knocking out both the No. 3 and 4 engines. The bombardier, F/O William J. Green, Jr., had just sung out "Bombs Away." Back in the radio compartment, the radio operator, Sgt Edward W. Cummings looked out into the bomb bay to ensure all the bombs had fallen and called out "Bombs ____." He did not finish. A small piece of flak came through the compartment, went through his first aid kit and hit him in the chest, killing him instantly. The copilot, 2Lt Dean A. Turner, was also hit hard in the right arm by the same flak burst.

With both engines on the same side out, No. 806 rolled over and fell out of the formation, dropping about 6,000 feet down to 18,000 feet. Lt

Turner remained at the controls long enough to help Lt Templeton gain control of the aircraft. He then went into the nose compartment to have his wound attended to. Sgt Earl R. Roach, the spot jammer, went forward to the copilot's seat to help Lt Templeton. Sgt Roach had 50 hours of solo flying time, but had not flown a B-17. Lt Templeton had to draw full power from the No. 1 and 2 engines to remain in the air. With full power on one side of the plane, the left rudders had to be jammed forward as hard as possible to keep No. 806 flying in a straight line. This was a strenuous task. Knowing they could not make it back to Bassingbourn, Lt. Templeton headed for the nearest emergency field on the continent, B-58 near Brussels.

As they turned to make the landing approach, because of fatigue from fighting the controls, Lt Templeton came in too high. When he went to lower the landing flaps, he discovered the controls were not working. He yelled for the flight engineer, Sgt Rolland E. Abbott, to lift the wheels. No. 806 sailed on about a mile beyond the end of the runway. Lt Templeton and Sgt Roach together finally brought No. 806 down in a wheels-up landing in a vacant field. The aircraft went sliding along the field, through a small stand of trees, the wings cleanly clipping off three or four of them, and nosed through a trolley embankment, before coming to rest. No fire, but No. 806 was salvage.

Following the Dorsten mission, John and his crew took off for a two-week "rest and relaxation" (R and R) leave in Scotland.

Saturday, 24 March the 91st flew two missions in support of "Operation Varsity", a large airborne drop of British and American troops across the Rhine. In the morning the 322nd, 324th and 401st Squadrons went to the airfields at Vechta. The afternoon mission was a Composite Group, formed by one Squadron each from the 91st (the 323rd Squadron), 381st and 398th Groups, that hit the Twente-Enscheden Airdrome in Holland. 2Lt George E. McEwen was scheduled to fly me on the first mission. However, there were problems at engine run-up and he switched to No. 263, "Ragan's Raiders", a Spare from the 323rd, taking off an hour after the others, but catching up with the formation. By the afternoon mission, Luther had me in working order again and I was taken up by 1Lt Ralph M. Dean of the 323rd and his crew. We took off at 1423 hours and flew in the No. 3 position in the Second Element of the High Squadron. We encountered only meagre, inaccurate flak. No damage. Touch down was at 1945 hours.

On the 28th the 91st went back to Berlin. For my third trip to the "Big B" I was flown by 2Lt Clarence E. Brooks and his crew as No. 2 in the Fourth Element of the High Squadron. After reaching 10,000 feet and going onto oxygen, we had

problems with the supply to the pilot and top turret. The navigator, 2Lt Irwin Moldafsky, made some quick adjustments and the oxygen started flowing again. We remained with the formation. As usual, a lot of intense red flak over the city, but no damage. Although the weather turned lousy on the return, we made it home OK, with touch down at 1412 hours. Next it was to the U-boat yards at Bremen on Friday the 30th of March, with 2Lt Harry V. Camp's crew aboard. The flak was furious, but only a few holes appeared in the fuselage. Our oxygen system went out as we approached the North Sea on the return so we left the formation, dropped down low and went the rest of the way to Bassingbourn on our own, touching down at 1725 hours.

Saturday, the 31st, once more was a stand-down for the 324th and I was designated a Deputy Lead Spare. 1Lt George E. Shoup of the 401st switched from his assigned plane, No. 754, to me. We flew Deputy Lead of the Lead Squadron to the secondary target, the railway station at Halle. The primary target, the Leuna synthetic oil refineries at Merseburg, was clouded over. At the target, the 323rd Low Squadron found themselves on a collision course with a Squadron from another Group that was coming in on the target from the wrong direction and had to make a 360 to get out of the way. Some wild maneuvering resulted, with planes on collision courses all over the place. Fortunately, no collisions, just a bunch of crewmen with dry mouths. Only five of the 12 aircraft of the Low Squadron were able to drop their bombs. We dropped our nineteen 300 pounders and two M-47 incendiaries with no problem.

In April, John and his crew were back from R and R. On the 4th we flew No. 3 in the Second Element of the Lead Squadron to the airfield at Fassberg. 2Lt Edgar M. Moyer's crew was flying in No. 880, "Little Miss Mischief", that day. As they climbed away from Bassingbourn to form up near the North Sea, the No. 1 engine cut out and had to be feathered. Then No. 4 stopped pulling full power. They had no choice but to circle back for a landing at Bassingbourn with their bombs still aboard and a full load of fuel. On landing there was some confusion between Lt Moyer and the copilot, 2Lt Robert C. Barnes, and the landing flaps were left in the up position. Even though Lt Moyer made a smooth touch-down, they came in a little too hard. The landing gear collapsed and "Little Miss Mischief" went skidding down the runway with sparks flying. As they slid to a stop near an anti-aircraft artillery emplacement there was some fire in escaping gas around the wings.

As soon as "Little Miss Mischief" slowed down all the crew except the navigator, 2Lt James C. Halligan, who was on his first mission, quickly crawled out and ran and jumped into the

emplacement depression. When Lt Moyer saw that Lt Halligan was not there he asked the flight engineer, Sgt Gus T. Goodis, to go get him out. Sgt Goodis looked in the nose window and saw Lt Halligan trying to get out the nose escape hatch, not realizing the nose was flat on the runway. Sgt Goodis broke out a Plexiglas window through which Lt Halligan crawled. They dived back into the gun emplacement, expecting the bombs to go off any second.

Just at this time the emergency fire crews arrived. Not seeing any of the crew around the plane, the major in charge sent his men in the plane to extract the crew. It was then that the crew of "Little Miss Mischief" stuck their heads up to see what was going on. When the major saw them, he went into orbit. He was angry that his men could have been killed while looking for them. However, the crew didn't feel it very wise to stand around exposed with the chance of the bombs going off next to them. In any event, the career of this unusual aircraft was over. "Little Miss Mischief", or "Half and Half", was salvage.

For us the mission was a milk run, no fighters and no flak. A long one, though. Eight hours and ten minutes with touchdown at 1450 hours.

On the 5th we again flew No. 3 in the Second Element, this time in the High Squadron, to the ordnance depot at Grafenwohr. We bombed kind of low, at 17,000 feet, and near Ludwigshaven on the return, ran into a solid mass of middle cloud cover. The formation dropped all the way down to 1,500 feet for the trip back across the continent. Over the North Sea we lifted up a little, to 1,800 feet, continuing at that altitude to Bassingbourn. The 7th, we were No. 3 in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron that went to the air field at Fassberg. The Lead and High Squadrons hit the air field at Kohlenbissen. A relatively easy mission, no fighters and meagre flak.

The air war seemed to be winding down to routine milk runs. There were only a few German fighters coming up at us now and then, most of which were flown by inexperienced pilots. These were readily dispersed by our "little friends", the fighter escorts. Although there was still "red flak" over some of the targets, it was causing relatively little damage. The crews were becoming somewhat complacent in respect to flying their missions.

The 324th didn't fly the 8th of April. But, when the other three Squadrons returned, the stark reality that there was a war, with its danger and death, still going on over the continent came home with vengeance. Two of the "old-timers", No. 504, "Times A-Wastin'", from the 401st, on her 96th mission with 1Lt Peter A. Pastras' crew aboard and No. 333, "Wee Willie", from the 322nd on her 128th

mission, flown by 1Lt Robert E. Fuller's crew, went down. Only the flight engineer and radio operator, T/Sgts Lyle D. Jones and Robert A. Smith, survived from Lt Pastras' crew. Lt Fuller was the only survivor from "Wee Willie." Bill Arthur's crew had flown their first mission as a crew in "Times A-Wastin'" on 8 July to Etaples. John's crew had flown in "Times A-Wastin'" on the 3rd of March to the Chemnitz marshalling yards. Bill's crew also had flown in "Wee Willie" to the Opau synthetic oil refineries on 9 September. It was quiet in the Officers Club and enlisted quarters that night.

On the 9th and 10th we were back in the air again, to the Me 262 jet fighter airfields at Oberpfaffenhofen and Oranienburg, flown both times by 1Lt Charles C. Wallace's crew, but with Lt Bullen flying as copilot. Me 262 fighters came up at us on the 9th, but their attacks were broken up by our fighter escorts before anyone was hit.

John's crew was back to fly to the oil storage depot at Freiham on the 11th and to Rochefort on April 15th. The latter was a tactical support mission against a pocket of by-passed German troops at the mouth of the Gironde River that were denying the Allies use of the port of Bordeaux. The entire approach to the target would be over Allied controlled France. Instead of forming up over England, we were requested to fly individually at 7,500 feet to the south of Paris where we would move into formation and climb to 14,900 feet for the run over the target. The crew of No. 936, Lead of the No. 3 Element, convinced their pilot, 1Lt Theodore "Mike" Banta, to make a flight over Paris. After some discussion, he acceded to their request. They flew up the Champs Elysees at 1,000 feet, over the Arc de Triomphe, around the Eiffel Tower and on to the formation point. A grand tour of Paris for them.

This was John's 35th and last mission. No such excitement for us--strictly to the target and home. We lifted off at 0650 hours and flew directly to the south of Paris where we formed up on the left wing of Lt Banta. There was only meagre and inaccurate flak over the target. We touched down at 1430 hours, taxied to the hardstand and John's war was over. He had taken me out and brought me back safely to Bassingbourn 22 times. We had an extra man aboard on this mission. Sgt Charles P. Blauser, one of Luther's ground crew, stowed away to get a taste of air combat. He was disappointed there was no action. The crew did not share in his disillusionment. I, too, was disappointed. It was obvious now that I would see France only from on high.

On the 16th Dave moved over into the left seat once again and flew the rest of the crew, with 2Lt Richard J. Wolfe as copilot, to marshalling yards at Regensburg. Another milk run. But, the next mission, Dave's last with me, was far from a milk

run. On the 17th we returned to the marshalling yards at Dresden. We were No. 2 in the Third Element of the Low Squadron. Even though there was very little left of Dresden following the massive raids of 13-15 February, the Germans were still protective of the city. The box barrage of flak was intense and close; we could see numerous red bursts just below us. We were in them a long time.

Three minutes before the target three Me 262s came swarming down through the Second Element. No. 568, "Skunkface III", of our Squadron, was flying across from us in the No. 2 position of the Second Element with 1Lt Harry V. Camp's crew aboard. This was the same crew who had flown me to Bremen just 18 days earlier. Cannon fire from one of the Me 262s tore apart the right wing tip of "Skunkface III." With pieces of metal flying all over the place, she dropped out of the formation, but kept on the bomb run and dropped on the target. As "Skunkface III" left the target, a single P-51 moved in alongside to provide protection, but she eventually went down. We didn't see her go. Only the tail gunner, S/Sgt Herman U. Evans, survived. John and his crew had flown "Skunkface III" to Schwerte the 28th of February. "Skunkface III" was the last 91st plane to be lost in combat. The men of Lt Camp's crew were the last from the 91st Group to be killed in action.

No. 205, "The Ruptured Duck", with 1Lt Edgar M. Moyer as pilot, was flying in the No. 3 position of the Second Element of our Low Squadron. This was the same aircraft in which the copilot, 2Lt Gilbert Willis, had been killed back on the 8th of September 1944 and had been crash-landed in France by Lt Weeks. Although at first considered to be salvage, "The Ruptured Duck" had been repaired and returned to the Bassingbourn on December 11th. "The Ruptured Duck" took Me 262 fighter hits at the same time as did "Skunkface III", wounding the tail gunner, Sgt William F. Joseph, and knocking out the No. 3 and 4 engines and the rudder. Lt Moyer headed for the advanced fighter air base, Y-84, at Giessen, Germany. On the downwind leg of the approach the No. 2 engine went out. Because of the sudden loss of power and rudder control problems they skidded off the runway when they landed. The plane ended up in a wooded area next to the base. All hands were safe, but this time "The Ruptured Duck" was salvage. John's crew had flown "The Ruptured Duck" to Chemnitz the 2nd of March.

No. 263, "Ragan's Raiders", Lead of the Third Element of the 323rd High Squadron was flown by 1Lt Theodore L. Skawinski. She was attacked by 2-3 Me 262s from 0600 O'clock low just as we came onto the target. On the first pass, a 20 mm cannon shell went through the center of the ball turret, hitting the gunner, S/Sgt Donald W. Pubentz,

in the stomach. The exploding shell blew away the rear half of the ball turret and threw Sgt Pubentz partially out of the turret. His body, held by one leg, flopped in the air stream for several seconds before falling away. Only part of one leg was left in the ball turret.

The 262s made a second pass at "Ragan's Raiders", this time hitting the No. 2 engine, knocking off the cowling, and putting holes through the tail. The Tail gunner, S/Sgt Raymond Murakowski, was wounded in the chest. An exploding 20 mm cannon shell drove parts of his flak vest into his body. The force of the explosion also had driven him back against the ammunition box, breaking his right arm. With loss of power in the No. 2 engine, the plane began losing altitude. The crew threw all loose equipment overboard and the flight engineer, S/Sgt Henry L. Lilley, jettisoned what was left of the ball turret. Still the aircraft could not maintain altitude. Lt Skawinski located a bombed-out grass airfield. He was not sure the airfield was in American hands yet, but had no choice. He had to set "Ragan's Raiders" down amongst the bomb craters. Once down the crew discovered the Americans had just taken the field.

Sgt Murakowski was taken to a nearby U S Army field hospital where, along with ground troop casualties, he awaited his turn for surgery. He was finally operated on about 2230 hours. After the surgery was completed, the surgeon, an army major, went to get a drink from the lister bag and was shot and killed by a German sniper. Death plays no favorites in war. The next morning the crew repaired the No. 2 engine, put Sgt Murakowski aboard and flew "Ragan's Raiders" back to Bassingbourn. Sgt Murakowski survived.

As we approached the target, Sgt Weems in the upper turret cut loose with a long burst with his twin .50 calibers that kept going like he would never get a chance to fire them again. The empty casings were bouncing off the metal floor making a tremendous racket throughout the plane. Dave couldn't see what he was shooting at and was afraid he was shooting at one of our own fighter escorts (at high speeds, P-51s look very similar to Me 109s). The 91st had shot down a P-51 the day before. The Group Commander, Col Terry, had read the riot act to the crews at briefing that morning about being careful of whom they shot at on this mission. In fact the P-51 pilot who had been shot down (and who had survived) was there to emphasize the point, not that the bomber crews were overly concerned. Seems as if he had flown through the formation--fair game at such high speeds.

Dave yelled at Sgt Weems over the intercom, asking what he was shooting at. Sgt Weems yelled back "Whatever it was, it was shooting at me, so I shot back." About that time

Dave saw a twin-engine Me 262 jet fighter flatten out 2,200 yards below the formation. It had gone by so fast Dave did not see it. Sgt Schumacher had seen the Me 262 flash by, but he had to hold off firing because a B-17 was in his line of fire.

The German fighter then came back at the formation. With it came two other Me 262s. The next attack on us came as a 262 barreled in from 0300 O'clock high. Sgt Schumacher fired on him as he went down past the ball turret, but had to keep his burst short as P-51s were too close on his break away. The next passes were from 0700 O'clock and 1100 O'clock. Both the nose and ball turret fired, but the jet fighters were too fast.

Then it became very hazy with visibility dropping to only 200 yards. There were tracer trails from the B-17 guns, from the P-51s and from the German fighters all over the place. The sky looked like the 4th of July back home. The main worry was shooting down one of our own planes since there were so many bullets going in all directions. Dave snuggled up as close as possible to the Element in front of us for protection. He got so close that the casings from the tail guns of the plane ahead and above us were bouncing off the nose. He had to back off a little. In all the wild maneuvering, No. 623, flown by 2Lt Robert H. Moore, on our left wing swerved to the right and almost forced us out of the formation. Within a few minutes the jet fighters ran out of fuel and broke away.

About an hour and a half after we left Dresden the copilot, F/O Wolfe, told Dave he had to go to the bathroom. Dave told him there wasn't any bathroom on the plane and he would have to hold it. After a while, F/O Wolfe said he had to go badly. So, Dave told him to go back and he would put a crack in the bomb bays. Remember, the bomb bays were just in front of the ball turret. In a short while Sgt Schumacher was yelling like mad over the intercom about what was happening to his tidy ball turret and who was going to scrub it off when they got back. He was very upset, to say the least, and kept raving and ranting at Dave over the intercom. At about the same time Manny Klette, the Squadron Lead, came on the radio asking Dave in a non-too-friendly tone why our bomb bay doors were down an hour and a half after we had dropped our bombs. Dave tried to tell him we had an "emergency" and the doors would be up shortly. Klette kept yelling at him, as did Sgt Schumacher. Dave finally told Sgt Schumacher to shut up and quit yelling over the intercom. He switched off the radio so he would not have to listen to Manny's tirade. The rest of the trip home was quiet.

After all was said and done, we had only a few small holes in the fuselage and wings and a messy ball turret, but there were nine rather unsettled crewmen! We touched down at 1806

hours and taxied to the hardstand. A wild final mission for Dave.

On the 21st 2Lt John E. Nichol's crew flew me in the No. 2 position of the Lead Element of the High Squadron to the marshalling yards at Munich. The crew was at station at 0510 hours, started engines at 0540, taxied at 0545, and lifted off at 0602 hours. We left the English Coast at 0625 hours at 3,600 feet, arrived the continental coast at 0647 at 8,100 feet, hit the IP at 1021 hours at 29,000 feet and dropped all twenty of our 250 pounders on the target at 1038 hours at 29,100 feet, rallied off the target, left the continental coast 1412 hours at 10,000 feet, arrived the English Coast at 1425 at 9,500 feet, and touched down at Bassingbourn at 1536 hours. Very good fighter cover, but no German planes in the air. The flak was meagre and inaccurate. Another milk run. We taxied to the hardstand and shut down the engines. My war was over. Although the 91st Group would fly one more mission, on the 25th of April to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, I was stood down. I would not fly another combat mission.

I was a survivor--74 combat missions, a lot of damage, but still flying. I had flown a total of 535 hours on bombing missions. And, only three aborts. Luther and his crew had done their job. I had taken 190 crew men, and one stow-a-way, out and brought them all home safely. Not one of my crew had been wounded. Fourteen men who had flown with me subsequently were killed when other aircraft in which they were flying were shot down. Twelve more became POWs. Eleven planes in which Bill, Hooper and John and their crews had flown went down on later missions. Forty-nine men on these planes were killed; 43 became POWs. During the eight months I was at Bassingbourn the 91st lost 41 planes to enemy fire, 160 crewmen were killed in action and another 144 became POWs. Of the 60 B-17s present at Bassingbourn when I arrived August 18th, only 22 were still flying when the war ended. I had led a charmed life, thanks in no small part to the proficiency of my ground and flight crews. Dave Bullen said "survival was 90% luck and 10% skill." It was that 10% that made the difference.

On the 13th of May, I made my last flight over the continent. This time 2Lt Philip J. Pugliese, who had flown as copilot to Dorsten on 22 March, flew me to Barth Germany, near the Baltic. We picked up 30 US Air Force POWs who had been interned at Stalag Luft I. We returned them to Laon, France. From there the ex-POWs were trucked to Rheims, where they were processed and moved to nearby Camp Lucky Strike to await movement back to the States. We flew on back to Bassingbourn. My service in Europe was complete.

"Our" war was in the history books. But, the final tally for the 91st was not yet complete. On the 15th of May, one week after V-E day, Maj James

L. Griffin, the 324th Squadron Operations Officer, who had flown the Lead plane on the 2 November Merseburg raid, was checking out as a fighter pilot in a P-47. Maj Griffin was doing low level rolls over the field. For some unknown reason, he failed to pull out of one slow roll and went in at a sixty degree angle on the west side of Runway 35. The plane exploded killing Maj Griffin, the last 91st fatality at Bassingbourn.

Returning Home

Little time was lost in clearing out the planes and personnel from Bassingbourn. My accountability was transferred to the Zone of Interior the 26th of May, the day we began "Operation Home Run", our trip back to the States. Everything happened so fast that day, I don't even remember who flew me back. Manny Klette assigned pilots and crews to given planes, along with enough other ground men for a total of 20 men per plane. They quickly climbed aboard and we were on our way. Twenty planes left Bassingbourn on Operation Home Run the 26th of May.

First we hopped over to Valley in Wales, then on to Goose Bay, Labrador, where we had to lay over for three days waiting for a severe storm to clear out. From Goose Bay we flew to Grenier Field, New Hampshire, the field at which I had stayed for over a week on my way to England. Just nine short months, but a lifetime, ago. This time we stopped only to refuel before going on to Bradley Field, near Hartford, Connecticut, arriving there the 31st. The 9th of June, I was flown to Romulus, Michigan and on the 12th to South Plains, Texas. There I patiently waited my fate. Finally, on the 26th of October the Army Air Corps declared me excess. The war in the Pacific was over. I had served my purpose.

I made my final flight the 2nd of December. Once more my Wright-Cyclone engines came to life. Once more I roared head-long down the runway, almost floating into the air--only a few gallons of gas and no bomb load to weigh me down. As before, my wheels tucked up into the wheel wells as we lifted off. Once again I viewed the world from above. This time a peaceful landscape floated by below--no tracking flak, no enemy fighters rising up to meet me. Then, I sank downward to become forever earth-bound, my tires giving off puffs of black rubbery smoke as they touched the runway. I slowly taxied to my parking space, brakes squealing, as usual, as we jockeyed into position. The engines that had carried me so faithfully the many, many hours exhaled their final convulsive coughs, the Hamilton-Standard propellers flipping to a standstill, never to spin again. Then only silence.

I was at Kingman, Arizona. On the 16th of December I was sold to a salvage company. The final entry was made in the log and my records

consigned to history. My 16 month 4-day career as 43-38220, as DF-L, as "Lady Lois", as "Little Jean", as an instrument of destruction, as a graceful lady of the air--all finished. Now I was only aluminum scrap.

Kingman, Arizona. As far as you could see, B-17's from the 1st and 3rd Air Divisions of the 8th Air Force and from the 15th Air Force. Forty-five other B-17s from the 91st were there. A few rows over was No. 909, "Nine-0-Nine", of the 323rd Squadron; 140 missions. Just beyond "Nine-0-Nine" was No. 636, "Outhouse Mouse", also of the 323rd; 139 missions, 12 of them to Berlin. Closer to me, No. 040, "Shirley Jean." She had been on our right wing on Bill's last mission, when four of Iver Tufty's crew bailed out over Cologne. There was No. 610, "Zootie Cutie." Bill had flown his first two missions in her and she had taken Hooper and his crew to a night in France back in November. And, there was No. 379, "Margie", Lt Warren T. Smith's plane. She came home.

Then there were the B-24s from the 2nd Air Division of the 8th Air Force, from the 15th Air Force and from Southeast Asia. Our B-17 crews used to make fun of the ungainly, paunchy, B-24s--"the shipping crates the B-17s came in", they used to say. Although they could fly farther, faster and carry heavier bomb loads than we could, the B-24s could not sustain the beating we B-17s could absorb. Because of this, German fighters typically would converge first on any B-24s in the bomber stream. More than one B-17 crew would say fondly of the B-24s--"best damn fighter cover we ever had." But, we had all flown for the same purpose, to get the war over as soon as possible so we could all go home. We had done our jobs the best we could and we had taken our lumps. Some of us had prevailed. All too many had not, B-17s and B-24s alike.

So, there we were, hundreds of beleaguered, battered, war weary survivors of our "Great Adventure." No longer would we be asked to carry out our deadly missions of destruction. No longer would our engines emit their sputtering coughs and harmonic roars at the pre-dawn engine run-up. No longer would we choreograph our contorted aerial dances as we orchestrated our complicated formations over foggy East Anglia. No longer would our fleecy white contrails fashion their direful decorations in the frosty skies above Europe. No longer would we hear the gravely crackle of flak ripping apart our Alcad aluminum skins. No longer would we carry young boys into harms way, returning them old beyond their years. We were silent phantoms of a time of destruction that, because of what we had endured, would never have to be lived out again. Now, we were awaiting our rites of passage. Ours would be peaceful.

An eerie silence surrounded the row upon row of deserted denizens of the air in that cemetery in the sands. Sometimes on clear moonlight nights one could almost hear the crackle of the intercoms drifting out amongst the ghostly silhouettes -- "10,000 feet and going on oxygen; everyone check in" -- "Watch him Joey Boy, he's coming in on your side" -- "Tracking flak closing in on our tail" -- "A B-17 from the High Squadron going down; come on guys bail out" -- "Bandits at 1100 O'clock low" -- "Christ a' Mighty, look at that flak up ahead" -- "Feather No. 2, Feather No. 2!!" -- "Four 109s coming in at 1000 O'clock high; Eddie, Bronx get on 'em" -- "Keep those bursts short guys, we've a long way to go" -- "Breaking at 0600 O'clock, breaking at 0600 O'clock" -- "Bail out, bail out!!" -- "Watch that fighter coming in at 0300 O'clock" -- "Setting autopilot; it's all yours bombardier" -- "Bombs away" -- "That was for Uncle Sam, now we are working for ourselves boys; let's go home." Or, was it only the wistful wind whispering through the broken windows?

Eventually the wreckers came, tore us apart, crushed us and hauled us away to the smelter. There we were melted back into ingots from whence we had come. Then it was on to the manufacturing plants, this time to become waffle irons, patio chairs, Reynolds aluminum wrap, and innumerable other consumer products. From the appliance plant to the hardware store, to a quiet home in the Midwest.

As the family went about its daily routine, busily embroiled in the personal stresses and exuberances of the day, little did they realize the adventures this utilitarian piece of shiny aluminum sitting so serenely on the kitchen counter had experienced--the dedication, the sacrifices, the drama, the stark terror to which it had been witness.

The Farewell

So we have come down to this. Jim and Betsy may decide to put me in a box along with some other worn out appliances and take me to the recycling center. From there I might be given yet another chance at life. But, from the amount of things they have to clean up in the short time they can be here, more likely I simply will be tossed into the garbage to be taken to the land fill. There, over the millennia, I will slowly corrode back to nothingness, never again to serve a useful purpose.

Whatever, I have no complaint. As one of our distinguished citizens said in a speech the night before he was taken from us that early April evening in Memphis, "..... it does not matter to me now. Because I have been to the top of the mountain." For, I, too, "have been to the top of the mountain." I risked mid-air collisions in the murky skies over East Anglia as I joined my formations. I braved the

box barrages of flak over Merseburg and Ludwigshaven. Three times I flew through the cauldron of flak that boiled over Berlin; three times I came home unscathed. I stared into the face of the best the Luftwaffe could throw at us and did not blink. I absorbed the hot jagged shards of flak from exploding 88's tearing through my fuselage, and returned all my crewmen safely. I saw planes explode in air tossing about their crews like so many floppy rag dolls. I saw pilots struggle to maintain control of their falling aircraft while the others bailed out--they sacrificed their own lives to save those of their crews. I saw the determined faces of teenagers in burning planes struggling to stay in formation to the target, knowing full well they would not survive--remaining forever young that others might grow old. All volunteers. No one said they had to become airmen.

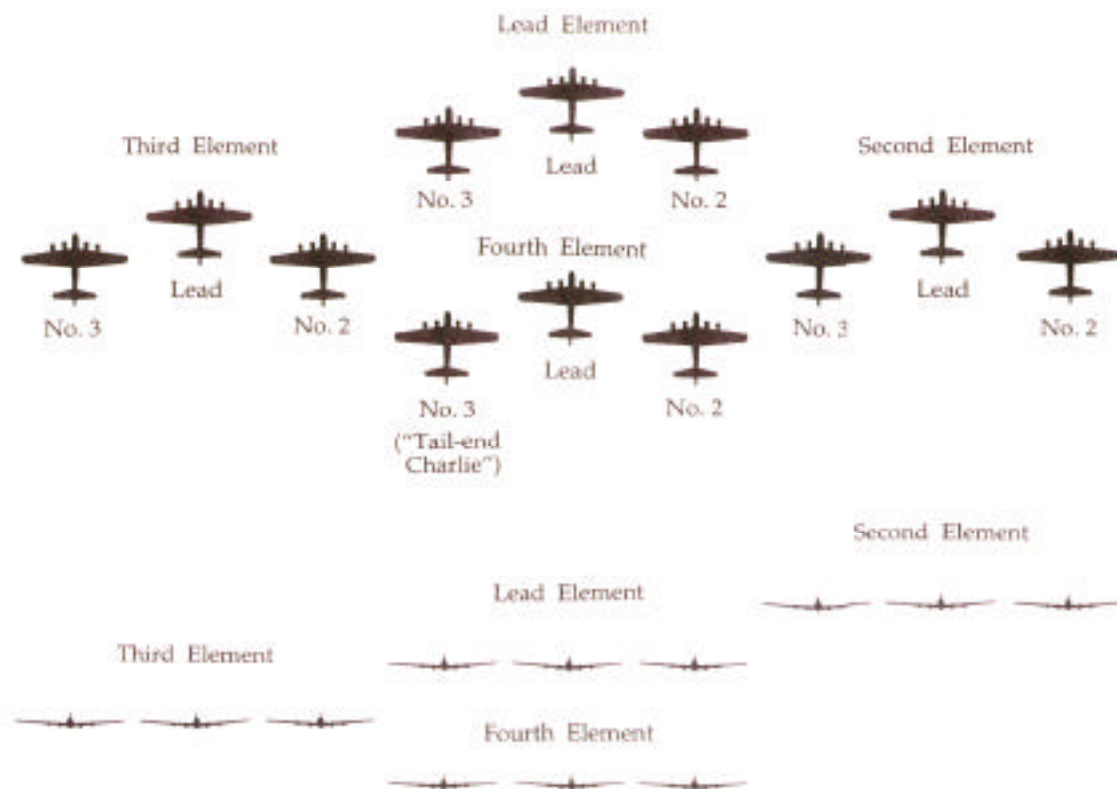
And, years later, as a waffle iron, I heard the excited squeals of small children around the Sunday morning breakfast table, instead of the squealing

sound of brakes as No. 220 had snaked her way along the taxiways to begin her deadly missions. Yes, from my beginnings in a small bauxite mine in Saline County, Arkansas, I have had the full experience of life. I was granted the privilege of sharing in the unassuming humble heroism, "only did what I had to do", of Bill Arthur and his crew, of Hooper Maplesden and his crew, of John Madsen and his crew, of the 164 other crewmen who flew with No. 220, and of all the other crews of the 8th Air Force. I was a part of the life experiences of Jim and Betsy as they grew from childhood to adults. Because of what the men who had flown in No. 220 had given of themselves, Jim and Betsy, and the other children of their generation, had the opportunity to live a childhood without fear.

In the lyrics of the Gershwin song that drifted out across the dispersal points from C Hanger that long ago damp September night, "Who could ask for anything more.



Bill Arthur crew of No. 220, "Lady Lois." Kneeling from the left: John P. McCann, tail gunner; Jimmy E. Yanzick, flight engineer/top turret gunner; Charles Chamberlain, waist gunner (transferred before joining No. 220); Charles E. Lee, waist gunner; Milton Ehrlich, radio operator; Michael J. Sesta, ball turret gunner. Standing, from the left: Robert H. Boyd, navigator; William H. Arthur, pilot; John M. Henderson, copilot; William J. Swindell, bombardier. (Bill Arthur)



Basic squadron formation pattern, flown by the 91st Bomb Group from late 1944 through the end of the war. Top: viewed from above. Below: view from rear. The spacing and specific pattern varied, depending on visibility, winds and other flight conditions.



Luther W. Heimbaugh, ground crew chief of No. 220, "Lady Lois"/"Little Jean." (Bill Arthur/Bill Potter)



Hooper Maplesden crew of No. 220, "Lady Lois." Kneeling from the left: Hooper R. Maplesden, pilot; Robert N. Hickinbotham, copilot; Robert Margolis, navigator; Daniel Haley, bombardier. Standing, from the left: Lyle B. McCullough, radio operator; Robert E. Kananen, waist gunner; Thayne I. Johnson, flight engineer/top turret gunner; Frank B. Dermody, Jr., tail gunner; Harry P. Hawks, ball turret gunner. (Dan Haley)



John Madsen crew of No. 220, "Little Jean." Kneeling, from the left: Boyd A. Weems, flight engineer/top turret gunner; Andrew M. Schumacher, ball turret gunner; Everett R. Ayres, waist gunner; Fred Ward, radio operator. Standing, from the left: H. John Madsen, pilot; David Bullen, copilot; Irvin W. Cannon, navigator; Robert J. Starr, bombardier. The tail gunner, Charles L. Coon, is not pictured. (Andy Schumacher)

Goodluck Talisman or Tragic Jinx? The Sagas of the “Short Snorters”

Order of the Short Snorters

A tradition prevalent among overseas air travelers of all nations from the late 1920s through the early 1940s, membership in the “Grand Order of the Short Snorters”, has long since disappeared and mostly faded from public memory. Although origins of the tradition are unclear, membership in this unofficial “Order” numbered in the millions during the early parts of World War II.

To become initiated into the Order, upon completion of a trans-oceanic air crossing, you first were required to give one dollar, each, to all members present. You then produced another dollar bill. You would sign this bill, which when counter-signed by a minimum of two members of the Order, became your “membership card” in the Order, your “Short Snorter.” Members of the Order, for brevity, were also referred to as “Short Snorters.” When you subsequently traveled to another country, you would take a currency bill of that country, have it signed by two Short Snorters present and tape it onto the end of the previous bill. As you traveled through a number of countries, your Short Snorter could become up to several feet long.

Your Short Snorter had to be in your possession at all times. Typically, the bill was rolled into a tight roll and carried in your pocket. Thereafter, whenever challenged by another member of the Order, you had two minutes to produce your Short Snorter. Failure to do so required that you either pay each member present one dollar or buy all a drink (a “short snort”, thus, the origin of the name of the Order). Over time, the Short Snorter bill came to be considered a good luck talisman. The “good luck” perhaps being you did not have to buy a round of drinks. Individuals soon came to be inseparable from their Short Snorters.

Senior officers and statesmen were honored to be members of the Order. Membership included such individuals as Lord Mountbatten, Generals Ira Eaker and Dwight Eisenhower, Prince Bernhart of the Netherlands, Wendell Wilkie, and Henry Luce, among others. It was the accepted custom to have other members sign your Short Snorter, similar to collecting autographs. All felt a comradeship with other members and readily signed Short Snorters of the lowest grades of enlisted men

Naming Planes

In naming aircraft during World War II, pilots and crews displayed a variety of emotions. Some aircraft were named after wives, girl friends, wish-they-were girl friends, cartoon characters, public figures, states, hometowns, and similar sentimental images. Others were named so as to

poke fun at or put down the enemy. Still others carried names and slogans, religious or good luck, that hopefully would provide protection from the enemy. It is not unexpected, therefore, that some planes carried the name “Short Snorter”, with the hope that the good luck talisman would provide protection from enemy fighters and flak, as well as from buying rounds at the bar.

How effective was the name? Did the presumed good luck extend to protection of the crews? Three B-17s in the 91st Bomb Group, all in the 401st Squadron, carried the name “Short Snorter.” Histories of these three bombers clearly demonstrate that the name on the nose provided no protection from the dangers of combat. The three aircraft had brief and tragic careers in the air war over Europe.

Bassingbourn

The 91st Bomb Group first was assigned to Kimbolton, a former RAF light bomber base, near Bedford, arriving on 3 October 1942. Runways at that base soon were found to be too weak to support heavy bombers. Living conditions abominable--cold Nissen huts and seas of mud. On the 13th of October, BG Newton Longfellow, 1st Bomb Wing (1BW) Commanding Officer, asked the 91st CO, Col Stanley T. Wray, to check out Bassingbourn, another RAF base, as a possible home for the 91st. This was a permanent heavy bomber base with solid runways, brick billets and administrative and repair buildings, central heating, and other amenities not found at newly constructed bases where most American bomber groups were stationed. Col Wray immediately saw Bassingbourn to be an ideal base for the 91st and simply moved the Group down the next day without first asking permission. Although placing him in hot water with his superiors, this decision earned Col Wray eternal gratitude of all men who served in the 91st for locating the Group at what came to be called the “Country Club of the 8th Air Force.”

Formations

During most of the time the three “Short Snorters” flew with the 91st Bomb Group, VIII Bomber Command, as it was then called, consisted of only six Heavy Bomb Groups. The 91st, 303rd, 305th, and 306th Groups, flying B-17s, comprised the 1st Bomb Wing (1BW). The 97th and 301st Groups flew with VIII Bomber Command from August to November 1942, but were transferred to the 12th Air Force in North Africa on 20 November 1942. The 1BW was organized into the 101st Provisional

Combat Wing (PBCW), which included the 91st and 306th Groups, and the 102nd PBCW, formed by the 303rd and 305th Groups. The 2nd Bomb Wing (2BW) consisted of the 44th and 93rd Groups, which flew B-24s.

During the early days, August to November 1942, of flying combat over Europe, VIII BC experimented with a variety of formations to provide maximum protection from German fighters and control of the Strike Force. Availability of aircraft for given missions also resulted in day to day variation in the way the Strike Force was organized.

Beginning 6 December and continuing through mid February, a "Javelin-down" formation, developed by the 305th Group, was adapted as the standard Group formation. This consisted of three squadrons, Lead, Low and High, each comprised of two V-shaped three-plane Elements. The front plane of an Element was the "Lead". The aircraft flying on the "right wing" of the Lead was the No. 2 plane; the No. 3 plane was on the "left wing" of the Lead bomber.

The Lead Element of the Lead Squadron was in front. The Second Element of the Lead Squadron flew slightly to the right or left of, depending upon the position of the sun, and below the Lead aircraft of the Lead Element. The Lead Element of the Low Squadron flew below, to the right or left of, and 320 feet behind the Lead aircraft of the Lead Squadron. The Second Element of the Low Squadron was to the right or left of and below the Lead Element. The High Squadron flew above, to the right or left of, and 320 feet behind the Lead Element of the Lead Squadron. The Second Element of the High Squadron flew to the right or left of and above the Lead Element. The Group formation was echeloned right or left so that the Second (low) Element of the Low Squadron was toward the sun and the Second (high) Element of the High Squadron was away from the sun. This allowed the crewmen in the higher planes to look down on the other aircraft with less glare from the sun in their eyes.

During December 1942 and January to early February 1943, Groups comprising the Strike Force were also deployed in a Javelin-down formation. Typically, one PBCW would be designated to lead the Strike Force, with one of the Groups serving as PBCW and, in turn, Strike Force Lead. The second Group of the Lead PBCW would fly about one and one half miles behind and 100 feet above the top of the Lead Group. The other PBCW would follow the Lead Wing. The Lead Group of the trailing PBCW would fly one and one half miles behind and 100 feet above the last Group of the Lead CW. The last Group would fly another one and a half miles behind and 100 feet above the Group ahead of it.

The Groups would be echeloned upward into the sun, i.e., with the following groups stair-stepped upward from the Lead Group, right or left, depending on the side from which the sun shone.

In mid February 1943, configuration of the Strike Force was tightened up into a wedge formation. The second Group of the Lead PBCW flew to the left of the Lead Group, 100 feet below and 320 feet to the rear. The Lead Group of the other PBCW positioned itself 320 feet behind and 100 feet above the Strike Force Lead Group. The second Group of that PBCW was staggered another 320 feet behind and 100 feet above the first Group. The B-24s of the 2BW then formed up 320 feet behind and 100 feet below the second Group of the Lead PBCW.

The "Short Snorters"

No. 449, "Short Snorter"

Aircraft No. 41-24449, the original "Short Snorter", was assigned to 401st Squadron of the 91st Bomb Group as part of the initial Squadron complement at Dow Field, Bangor, Maine in September 1942. She was flown overseas by 1Lt William D. Bloodgood, carrying eight other air crewmen and a ground crew passenger.

The 91st flew its first mission from Basingbourn on 7 November, to the submarine pens at Brest. The 401st Squadron did not put up planes on the 7th. No. 449 flew her first mission the next day, to the German fighter airfield at Abbeville, France. This field later was to become home of the crack German Jagdgeschwader (JG) 26 fighter group, called the "Abbeville Kids" by the American bomber crews. The primary target on 8 November was the aircraft dispersal area to the east of town. For this mission, the 91st put up 12 bombers, five from the 401st Squadron. 1Lt William D. Bloodgood and his crew flew No. 449 in Low Squadron.

The 91st went to Abbeville alone. The 301st and 306th Bomb Groups, the only other Groups up on 8 November, went to Lille, France. When the 323rd Lead aircraft, No. 399, "Man-O-War", with LTC Baskin R. Lawrence, who was leading the Group, aboard had to abort the mission, Cpt Haley W. Aycock, the 401st Squadron CO, flying in No. 431, "The Saint", took over as Group Lead.

Weather conditions over England and above the Channel were clear, with a few cumulus clouds floating over the French coast and target. Two groups of 18 each, Spitfires, one group on each side of the 91st bomber formation, flew as escorts to and from the target. There was no fighter protection to the rear of the formation. Enemy fighters were not encountered on the way to the target. The 91st Group formation started receiving flak bursts about 10 miles east of Ault. Flak attacks continued on to the target and all the way to the coast on the route

out. Although heavy in some places, most of the bursts were below and to the rear of the aircraft. Only sporadic hits were registered on the bombers.

No. 449 dropped on the target at 1159 hours from 21,000 feet. However, Lt Bloodgood banked No. 449 a little too soon in coming off the target resulting in an inaccurate release. No one was able to see if the bombs hit the target. Two of the ten 500 pound bombs also hung up and had to be returned to base.

Fourteen Me 109 German fighters attacked the 91st formation as it left the French coast on the way out. The enemy aircraft came in on the bombers from 0500 O'clock to 0700 O'clock low, most carrying the attack to within 800 yards of the bombers. None of the runs came from the sides or from the front. Cpt Aycock was hit in the left leg by a .30 caliber bullet at the beginning of the attack, thus became the first 401st casualty.

No. 449 received considerable damage from flak and from the fighter attacks. Shrapnel from exploding 88 mm anti-aircraft shells broke the window in front of Lt Bloodgood. Shrapnel also punctured the No. 1 gas tank. Three FW 190s pressed their attack to within 50 yards of No. 449. All four propellers were penetrated by machine gun bullets, while both wings had numerous .30 caliber bullet holes in them. A 20 mm cannon shell went through the No. 4 engine cowl. Another 20 mm shell exploded in the rear of the fuselage, hitting the VHF transmitter. Explosions tore away the elevator control cables and the auxiliary cables, leaving a gaping hole in the fuselage. The radio receiver was knocked out and the oxygen line to the radio compartment cut.

In spite of the severity of the damage, Lt Bloodgood brought No. 449 safely back to base, touching down at 1316 hours. The only injuries incurred by the crew were steel splinters in the faces of the bombardier, 1Lt William St. Chubb, and the radio operator, T/Sgt William H. Steele. Neither was seriously wounded. Lt Chubb was the regular bombardier on Lt Bloodgood's crew, but was manning a waist gun in place of Sgt T.J. Sams who was unable to fly on this mission. 2Lt Sparkling B. Anderson flew as bombardier in Lt Chubb's place.

Because of the extent of her damage, No. 449 would not be in the air again until 12 December. In the meantime, Lt Bloodgood and his crew were assigned to No. 527, "The Sky Wolf", for a mission to St Nazaire on the 23rd of November. "The Sky Wolf" did not develop sufficient manifold pressure in the No. 2 engine to maintain air speed. During an early testing of the machine guns on a bomber flying above "The Sky Wolf", a shell casing knocked out the windshield in front of the copilot, 2Lt Cecil R. Taber. Lt Bloodgood had to abort the mission while still over England and return to Bassingbourn.

On 12 December, No. 449 was repaired and appeared ready to fly again. For the mission to Romilly sur Seine Aerdrome, near Paris, most of Lt Bloodgood's crew were assigned to No. 449. At briefing, however, 1Lt Harold H. Beasley was told he, rather than Lt Bloodgood, was to fly as first pilot in aircraft No. 449. Lt Beasley had flown as copilot with Lt Bloodgood on the 8th of November and had taken most of Lt Bloodgood's crew in No. 447, "Kickapoo", to Romilly on the 17th of November. Ten minutes before taxi time on the 12th the radio operator, T/Sgt William H. Steele, discovered that the back plate of his gun had been stolen. Lt Beasley sent him to armament to get another plate. However, it did not fit. Three minutes before taxi time Sgt Steele went back to get another one and met the plane at the taxi point. After No. 449 got into the air, it was discovered this plate would not work, either. Lt Beasley aborted and came directly back to base.

On the 20th of December No. 449 was assigned to Cpt William R. Harris, who was flying as first pilot for Cpt John W. Eanes' crew this day. 2Lt Beman E. Smith, Cpt Eanes copilot, was in the right seat, as copilot. Again the Group went to Romilly sur Seine Aerodrome. For this mission the 101st PBCW led the Strike Force, with the 306th Bomb Group leading the 101st PCBW. The 306th was followed by the 91st, 305th and 303rd Groups, echeloned rearward and upward in that order. Twelve B-24s from the 44th Bomb Group of 2BW joined 60 B-17s of the 1BW that went over the continent.

No. 449 flew in the No. 2 position of the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. Weather over England and the continent was good. The Strike Force was subjected to only light and inaccurate flak five miles north of Dieppe, over the target and north of Paris. No. 449 incurred only minor flak damage to the fuselage.

Between 50 and 75 enemy aircraft, both Me 109s and FW 190s began harassing the bomber stream about 35 miles inland from the French coast. The attacks kept up on to the target and on the return, until the bombers were about 15 miles out over the Channel. German fighters peeled out of their formation four at a time to make a feint at the formation. These flights then split into groups of two and came barreling in on the bombers at 1100 O'clock or between 0100 O'clock and 0200 O'clock.

A 20 mm shell exploded in the cockpit of No. 449, shooting away the engine control and mixture control for the No. 4 engine and setting off two of the flares stored in the cockpit. The oil line to No. 4 engine also was cut. A number of small holes appeared in the air craft--two in the ball turret, one in the left horizontal stabilizer, four in the tail section, and one in the tail assembly. Large holes

were blown in the nose and left wing just back of the No. 2 engine nacelle as well as three in the left wing. In spite of extensive damage from the fighter attacks, none of the crew was wounded. Cpt Harris and Lt Smith brought No. 449 safely back to base.

Two planes from the 401st went down--No. 432, "Danellen" with 1Lt Dan W. Corson's crew aboard (9 KIA, 1 POW) and No. 452, flown by 1Lt Robert S. English and his crew (3 KIA, 7 POW). Two others were badly damaged. A flak burst set the No. 3 engine on fire and released the landing gear of Cpt Ken Wallick's Lead plane, No. 512, "Rose O'Day", causing her to drop behind the formation. 1Lt Bruce Barton, in No. 439, "Chief Sly", and 1Lt James D. Baird, flying No. 483, "Spirit of Alcohol", dropped back to provide protection for "Rose O'Day". Both "Rose O'Day" and "Chief Sly" were hit hard by German fighters. Although Cpt Wallick was able to bring his aircraft back to Basingbourn, the No. 3 propeller broke on landing, tearing away part of the engine cowl. "Rose O'Day" eventually was repaired and flew again. Lt Barton had to crash land "Chief Sly" in a pasture near Fletching, Sussex. "Chief Sly" was salvage.

The ground crew worked effectively the next few days and No. 449 was ready to fly again on the 30th of December. Lt Bloodgood was back aboard with his crew for a raid on the submarine pens at Lorient, France. Once again the 306th Group led the Strike Force with the 91st, 303rd and 305th echeloned upward in that order. Each 91st bomber carried two 2,000 pound bombs. It was hoped such large bombs might break through the thick concrete over the pens.

The 323rd Squadron led the Group for this mission. Maj Paul D. Brown, in No. 549, "Stupen-Taket", was Group Lead. The 401st CO, Maj Edward P. Myers, was flying as copilot with Cpt Oscar D. O'Neill in No. 070, "Invasion 2nd", as Squadron Leader. No. 449 flew in the No. 2 position of the Second Element, on the right wing of Cpt John W. Eanes in No. 447, "Kickapoo."

Moderate, but generally inaccurate flak was encountered by the Strike Force from flak ships in the Channel and along the route to the beginning of the bomb run, the Initial Point (IP), at Dos Porden, and on into the target. Heavy flak rocked and tore into the bombers. Approximately 30 FW 190s charged the formation while over the target. Attacks came from all directions except the rear. Fighters lined up in front of the formation in two lines, one on each side of "Stupen-Taket." They peeled off out in front and came charging through the formation.

During the fighter attacks, "Invasion 2nd" took a number of 20 mm cannon shells. Maj Myers, was hit in the femoral artery by cannon shell fragments and bled to death. The radio operator, T/Sgt Thomas B. Cottrell, was badly wounded in

the left arm and left leg. The No. 4 engine was knocked out, the electrical system went out and there were numerous holes in the wings and fuselage. The ground crews had a lot of work to do before "Invasion 2nd" would be ready to fly again.

A head-on attack on No. 449 by FW 190s set the No. 3 engine on fire just as she cleared the target. The plane immediately started going down. About five minutes later, as she went out over the Atlantic, two chutes were observed to come from the aircraft just before "Short Snorter" exploded, the debris falling into the water. None of the ten crewmen survived.

No. 449 was credited with three missions.

No. 362, "Short Snorter II"

No. 42-5362 arrived at Basingbourn in early January 1943 and immediately was pressed into service. She had not been test flown by the 91st before being sent on a mission on the 13th of January.

Cpt Oscar O'Neill's crew was assigned to No. 362 for this mission. Their regular plane, No. 070, "Invasion 2nd", was still being repaired from damage incurred on the mission to Lorient on 30 December. No. 362 was not up to flying a combat mission. While still over England a series of technical failures occurred. The No. 1 engine started running rough as Cpt O'Neill took her above 20,000 feet. There was a leak in the right oxygen system, which was almost empty by the time they formed up. The oil temperature was too high in the No. 4 engine. The ball turret was leaking oil and the guns would not fire when tested. The intercom was in poor working condition making it difficult for the crew to communicate. And, the left waist and tail guns were not adjusted correctly. Cpt O'Neill had no choice but to abort the mission and return to base. Not a stellar start for No. 362. Most of the problems could have been avoided had she been test flown before being sent out on the mission.

On the 23rd of January, No. 362 again was put up. This time 1Lt Earl F. Riley's crew was aboard. As No. 362 moved above 15,000 feet oil temperature in No. 4 engine again became too high, 110 degrees C, 22 degrees above the upper limit. The No. 2 engine began vibrating and the Vicker's unit (that "drove" the ball turret) and oxygen system in the ball turret went out. Once more No. 362 aborted back to base.

On the 4th of February, No. 362 finally received her baptism of combat over Fortress Europe. For this mission, and those to come, she was assigned to 1Lt Beman E. Smith and his crew. Most of the men were from Cpt John W. Eanes' crew. Lt Smith had been copilot on Cpt Eanes' crew. Cpt Eanes had flown as first pilot on the 6th and 30th of December and on the 27th of January. His crew, with Cpt John W. Harris filling in as first pilot for

Cpt Eanes, flew in No. 449 on 20 December. After the 27 January mission, Cpt Eanes requested relief from flying as command pilot and was stood down. He was appointed Operations Officer for the 401st Squadron. From time to time afterwards Cpt Eanes flew as copilot of the 401st Lead aircraft. Cpt Eanes eventually transferred out of the 91st Bomb Group to qualify as a fighter pilot, ending the war flying P-38s. When Cpt Eanes left the crew, Lt Beman moved over to the left seat as first pilot. This was the first mission Lt Smith would fly as a command pilot. His copilot was 1Lt Robert W. Freihofer,

The primary target for the 4th was the marshalling yards at Hamm. The secondary target was the marshalling yards at Osnabruck. The 101st PCBW, with the 306th Group leading was in front of the 102nd PBCW, led by the 303rd Group on this mission. Lt Beman and No. 362 flew in the No. 2 position of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. No. 362 carried ten 500 pound bombs for her first "delivery" to Germany. Both the primary and secondary targets were clouded over so the Strike Force diverted to a target of opportunity, Emden. Here the bombers dropped through dense clouds and an effective smoke screen. Results of the bombing were not observed because of the visual obstruction.

This was a rough mission for the 91st Group. German fighters hit 91st formation when it was about 10 minutes from Emden. Between 15-20 fighters attacked the bombers on into the target. Fighters continued to pound the bombers on the way home until the aircraft were well out over the North Sea. Most of the attacks came from the rear. There also was heavy and very accurate flak over the target and at Vlieland on the way out.

Two 323rd High Squadron bombers went down. No. 544, "Pennsylvania Polka", with 1Lt Alan L. Burrows' crew, which had started out as Lead of the Second Element, was lagging behind the formation on the return when jumped by enemy aircraft. "Pennsylvania Polka" went down in the North Sea, taking all ten crewmen with her to the bottom. No. 589, "Texas Bronco", which was on Lt Burrow's right wing, was hit by flak over the target and later by Me 109s and Me 110s. The pilot, 1Lt Eugene B. Ellis, crash-landed on the beach of Terschelling Island, Holland, where the crew destroyed the aircraft. The bombardier, 1Lt Marvin H. Beiseker, Jr., was killed in the air and the radio operator, S/Sgt Michael T. La Medica, died of wounds later in the day. The rest of the crew became POWs.

Over half of the returning 91st planes were severely damaged and five crewmen wounded. No. 362 incurred no damage from either flak or German fighters.

On the 14th, Lt Smith and crew were back in the air with No. 362. However, the mission was aborted before reaching the target owing to bad weather over the continent. Two days later Lt Smith took No. 362 out, this time with 2Lt John W. Wilson as his copilot. They started out as No. 2 in the Lead Element of the Lead Squadron. Soon after crossing over onto the continent, No. 362 began experiencing mechanical problems. There was ice on the nose windows. The oxygen lines in the ball turret went out. The left tail gun would not fire. The driving spring in the right waist gun was weak and the ammo would not feed. The top turret guns froze up and the radio gun failed. Lt Smith aborted the mission and turned back to Bassingbourn, bringing his bomb load with him. Ground batteries fired a heavy flak barrage at No. 362 as she went over Barfleur. The bursts missed to the right and left of the tail.

Up to now No. 362 was experiencing a rather unproductive combat tour. Her first two mission attempts were aborted while still over England. Another abort occurred as she crossed onto the continent. One mission was recalled before the Strike Force reached the target. On the only mission she was able to complete, bombing results were of uncertain effectiveness. But, No. 362 had been hit neither by German fighters nor flak.

This was all to change on the 26th of February. On this day the primary target was harbor facilities at Bremen, with the port of Wilhelmshaven the alternate target. The 91st was joined by 42 B-17s from the 303rd, 305th and 306th Groups and by 6 B-24s from the 44th and 93rd Groups of the 2nd BW. The 102nd PBCW led the 1BW Strike Force, with the 305th Group in front.

Lt Smith's crew again was aboard No. 362. For this mission, 1Lt Thomas A. Strecker was copilot. T/Sgt Benjamin F. Ward was filling in for T/Sgt Norman L. Thompson as flight engineer and top turret gunner. Sgt Thompson, had injured his hands in a ground accident and could not wear his flight gloves, so was grounded for the mission. This injury was to save his life. No. 362 flew as No. 2 of the Second Element of the High Squadron.

The mission started out routinely with the crewmen up at 0230 hours for a quick breakfast to get to briefing at 0315 hours. Crews were at stations at 0730 hours and all aircraft were in the air by 0815. The weather was clear and from all indications it would be a routine mission. Not so.

The Strike Force was ten minutes late coming together as some of the Groups had difficulty in moving into their proper places in the formation. On the way across the North Sea, the Lead Navigator of the 305th Group forgot to check wind velocity. As a result, the entire Strike Force

drifted several miles south of the briefed route, taking it over the German anti-aircraft positions on the Frisian Islands. A number of aircraft received flak damage from these batteries. No. 362 was not among them, however. The Strike Force was also flying well above the briefed altitude as it crossed the North Sea. Waiting German fighters intercepted the formation just off Vlieland Island in the Frisians.

No. 362 was reported turning back just before reaching the Islands, under control and apparently undamaged. Most likely Lt Smith was encountering more mechanical problems and was aborting back to base. Almost immediately after No. 362 left the formation, she was observed being pounced upon by five twin-engine Ju 88 enemy aircraft. There were no further observations. No. 362, along with all ten of her crew went to the bottom of the North Sea. The names of the crewmen are now inscribed upon the "Wall of the Missing" at the American Cemeteries at either Margraten, Netherlands or Madingley, England.

Thus ended the brief and tragic life of No. 362, along with Lt Smith and his crew.

No. 362 was credited with four missions, only one of which resulted in bombs being dropped on the target.

No. 337, "Short Snorter III"

No. 42-5337 also arrived at the 91st in early January, but was not sent out on a mission until the 14th of February. 1Lt Earl F. Riley and his crew were aboard for her initial mission. As noted earlier, the entire Strike Force was called back because of poor weather conditions over the continent. No. 337 brought back her bombs. She was back up again on the 16th of February, with 1Lt John W. Carroll's crew. After reaching 23,000 feet while forming up, the ball turret heating unit was discovered not working. With an air temperature of -33 F, the ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Robert H. Ade, became unconscious because of the cold. Lt Carroll had to abort and return to Bassingbourn while still over England.

On the 26th of February, No. 337 was assigned to 2Lt Nathan F. Lindsey and his crew as their primary plane. Lt Lindsey had flown as copilot with Lt Smith in No. 362, "Short Snorter II", on the recalled mission of the 14th. Once again No. 337 experienced mechanical problems while still over England. The electric suits of both waist gunners went out. That of the left waist gunner, S/Sgt Nick A. Criscito, caught on fire. Lt Lindsey turned back an hour and ten minutes after take-off, bringing his bomb load back to Bassingbourn. No. 337 seemed to be falling into the same pattern as that of No. 362 in respect to not making it to the target. Sometime after this mission and after No. 362 went down, No. 337 acquired the name "Short Snorter III."

On the next to last day of February, No. 337 finally completed a mission, an easy one. Lt Lindsey and his crew were with her once more, this time flying as No. 2 in the Second Element of the Lead Squadron. The target was the submarine base at Brest, France. Eighteen aircraft from the 91st joined up with 45 B-17s from the 303rd, 305th and 306th Groups in 1BW, along with 15 B-24s from the 44th and 93rd Groups of 2BW. The 101st PBCW was in the lead, with the 102nd PBCW following in the upper arm of the wedge. The 306th Group led the Strike Force.

The 91st planes arrived at the Wing assembly point on time and formed up on the Lead Group. Cloud cover over the briefed route was 10/10 until about 40 miles from Brest. When the formation broke from the clouds it was north of the briefed course. Because of this, the Strike Force missed the rendezvous with its Spitfire fighter cover. The Lead Group also had to set a new course for the bomb run, to begin from the south of Brest. The formation went over the target on a NNE direction and dropped at 1456 hours from 24,000 feet. Flak was intense, but inaccurate, at the target. The Strike Force went off the target and on out to the coast on the course it should have taken coming in. As the bomber stream approached the French coast, it picked up the fighter escort which accompanied it back across the Channel. Only four FW 190s and two Me 109s approached the Strike Force and these came no closer than 1,000 yards to the bombers.

The electrical suit of the tail gunner, S/Sgt Anthony J. Roy, malfunctioned and his left hand became frost-bitten. But, No. 337 suffered no damage from flak. Her first completed mission was essentially a milk run.

Not so the next mission. The mission to the marshalling yards at Hamm, Germany on the 4th of March was one of the most dramatic missions the 91st Bomb Group flew during the entire air war. The 102nd PBCW led the Strike Force on this mission, with the 303rd Group flying as the Lead. The 101st PBCW, comprised of the 306th, as Lead, and 91st Bomb Groups, followed the 102nd. Maj Paul L. Fishburne, the 22-year old Commanding Officer of the 322nd Squadron, led the 91st. Lt Lindsey and No. 337 were No. 2 in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron.

The Strike Force took off at 0800 hours, formed on schedule and headed out over the North Sea. The groups encountered heavy, 10/10, cloud cover consisting of three layers between 13,000 and 17,000 feet. Above these was another layer of crystal clouds extending from 21,500 to 26,000 feet. Visibility soon dropped to less than 1,000 yards. When it appeared conditions would not improve, the 102nd PBCW diverted south, where it

encountered clear skies and dropped on Rotterdam, the secondary target. The 306th aborted back to England. Because radio silence was maintained on the mission, Maj Fishburne was unaware that the other groups had left and the 91st was going on alone.

Earlier, at briefing, the 91st weather officer, Maj Lawrence A., "Sunshine", Atwell had told the crews there would be dense clouds over the North Sea, but that conditions should improve as they approached the continent and would be clear over the target. As "Sunshine" had predicted, the lower cloud layers diminished to about 5/10 cover near the coast. Maj Fishburne continued on course, assuming the other groups were up ahead of him in the soup and that the Strike Force was progressing as briefed.

As the 91st crossed over onto the continent, the skies cleared, revealing no bombers or contrails up ahead. Maj Fishburne called his tail gunner, S/Sgt Thomas J. Hansbury, and asked how many planes were still in the formation. Sgt Hansbury replied, "Sixteen." Maj Fishburne then realized the 91st was all alone and heading over the continent with only 16 aircraft. It was the policy of higher headquarters that small groups of unescorted bombers not go deep into enemy territory. Maj Fishburne had to make a decision as to whether to abort back to base or go on to the target with his small force. Although he would have been justified in turning back, Maj Fishburne made the decision to continue on to the target. His orders had been to bomb the target. He assumed, correctly, the target would be clear. Irrespective of what the other groups had done, Maj Fishburne followed the last orders of which he was aware. The 91st continued on to Hamm.

With Bomb Groups scattering in different directions, German air defense was confused briefly. Fighters did not attack the 91st formation until it was 30 minutes from the target. Then all hell broke loose. Approximately 175 fighters came at the formation for the next hour. FW 190s, Me 109s, Me 110s, and Ju 88s attacked the bombers singly and two or three in line, abreast or in trail. The attacks were mostly between 1000 O'clock and 0200 O'clock low and high. The enemy aircraft concentrated on individual bombers rather than the formation in general.

Anti-aircraft batteries threw up shells at intervals along the route all the way in and back out. Flak over the target was especially intense and relatively accurate. In spite of the vicious fighter attacks and flak over the target, the 91st dropped on the target with most bombs hitting the aiming point. A highly accurate bit of bombing.

But, the Group paid a price. Four bombers were lost from the formation of 16 aircraft. No. 549, "Stupen-Taket" of the 323rd was hit by the flak

barrage and exploded in mid air, the debris coming down about 8 km NE of Dulmen (8 KIA, 2 POW). A 322nd Squadron aircraft, No. 512, "Rose O'Day" (7 KIA, 3 POW), was shot down by German fighters and crashed in the North Sea off Texel Island, Holland. Two 324th aircraft, No. 370 (9 KIA, 1 POW) and No. 464, "Excalibur" (3 KIA, the other 7 crewmen rescued by Air Sea Rescue and returned to Basingbourn) were also hit by German fighters and ditched in the North Sea. A 401st crewmen, S/Sgt Edward N. Yelle, radio operator on Cpt O'Neill's No. 070, "Invasion 2nd", was killed in the air. No. 337 came through all the action nearly unscathed. There were only two, 3-inch holes in the right wing and a rip in the right tail elevator fabric.

Photo reconnaissance flights three days after the attack revealed almost all bombs had fallen on target. Cpt Tex McCrary of the European Theater of Operations News Service, who had flown on several other missions and perused numerous strike photos, flew the mission with Cpt O'Neill. Cpt McCrary and the photo interpreters, concluded the Hamm strike to be the most perfect they had observed to date.

Still, the Generals at higher headquarters were more than a little upset that Maj Fishburne had continued on alone with such a small force. On the other hand, that he took the 91st on to the target with excellent bombing results, while the other groups diverted from the briefed mission, could not be overlooked. Somewhat reluctantly, Maj Fishburne was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). However, Maj Fishburne was reduced in rank to Captain and transferred to the 351st Bomb Group at Polebrook. There he was assigned as CO of the 509th Squadron and promoted back to Major. The 91st Bomb Group was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC) for its accomplishments on the 4th, the first Bomb Group to be so designated. So as not to encourage other groups to go it alone deep into enemy territory, the DUC award was not made known until two years following the end of the war!

When the strike results of the Hamm raid were reported to Churchill and Roosevelt, previous skepticism regarding the soundness of high altitude precision daylight bombing of strongly defended targets without fighter cover weakened. The 4 March mission by the 91st Bomb Group has been credited with being a major factor in the decision to continue daylight bombing.

The next mission No. 337 and Lt Lindsey flew, to the submarine pens at Lorient, France on the 6th was a milk run. They flew in the No. 2 position in the Second Element of the Low Squadron. The bombardier, 2Lt Albert Dobsa, dropped their five 1,000 pound bombs on target. Flak over the target was moderately heavy, but inaccurate. No German fighter fired on the 91st formation. One FW 190

dived down through the formation, behind the No. 2 bomber, No. 339, "Man-O-War", in the Lead Element of the Lead Squadron. The fighter had just taken on a plane in the leading 306th Group and was simply diving to escape rather than attack the 91st. No. 337 incurred no damage on the mission.

On the 8th of March, the target for the 91st Bomb Group was the marshalling yards at Rennes, France. Lt Lindsey and his crew were stood down for this mission. 1Lt Harold H. Beasley's crew took No. 337 out. They flew No. 3 in the Second Element of the Lead Squadron.

Two minutes after the Spitfire fighter cover left the Strike Force at Collience, France, 20 enemy aircraft attacked the bombers. German fighters kept up the attack for 38 minutes, until Spitfire fighter cover resumed near St. Lo on the way out. Both FW 190s and Me 109s attacked the aircraft singly from between 1000 O'clock and 0200 O'clock. Only slight and inaccurate flak came up at the 91st formation. The heaviest flak concentrations were fired at the following 306th Bomb Group. No. 337 received no damage and dropped her ten 500 pounders on target.

Lt Lindsey and crew were back aboard No. 337 for the mission to the marshalling yards at Rouen, France on the 12th. They flew No. 2 in the Lead Element of the Lead Squadron. The Strike Force had good Spitfire fighter protection from the time it started over the Channel, all the way to and from the target. German fighters made only a few feeble passes at the formation. None was effective. There was light inaccurate flak over the target and along the route out. No. 337 dropped her five 1,000 pound bombs on the target and returned to Bassingbourn with no damage. Another milk run.

The next mission the 91st flew, on the 13th was pure confusion. The primary target was the locomotive depots at Amiens, France, the alternate, marshalling yards at nearby Abbeville. The 102nd PBCW was in lead of the 101st PBCW, with the 305th Bomb Group leading the Strike Force. The 91st was flying Lead of the 101st PBCW, with the 306th assigned to fly high on its right.

The Lead Squadron was composed of two Elements from the 324th Squadron and one from the 323rd Squadron. Cpt Robert K. Morgan was in the Lead aircraft, No. 485, "Memphis Belle." Cpt Bruce D. Barton, in No. 139, "Chief Sly II", led the five bombers in the High Squadron. Cpt Oscar D. O'Neill, in No. 070, "Invasion 2nd", led the five aircraft in the Low Squadron. No. 337 flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

When the Strike Force formed up over England, the 306th Group insisted on flying at the altitude and position in the formation assigned to the 91st Group. It was with difficulty that the 91st was able to edge the 306th out of its position and to

form up correctly. Then, while going over the Channel, the 305th Lead Group took the Strike Force to the west of the briefed route, crossing over Dieppe rather than Cayeux. When it reached the IP, the 91st was to execute a right turn to make the bomb run over the target. As the 91st started its turn, the pilots saw the 306th Group flying to their right at the same altitude, 23,000 feet, preventing them from turning onto the IP and making a run to the target. The 91st formation scattered like a flushed covey of quail as Squadron Leads maneuvered to miss the 306th planes.

In the confusion, Cpt O'Neill, popped his plane upward to avoid the 306th bombers. He continued up and over the 306th formation and went on to the primary target. Six aircraft went with him. These included the four other planes of the 401st Low Squadron, one from the Lead Squadron, No. 639, "The Careful Virgin", with 1Lt Charles R. Giauque at the controls and No. 178, "The Old Standby" and Cpt Kenneth K. Wallick from the High Squadron. The seven planes dropped forty-two 1,000 pound bombs on Amiens from 24,500 feet, but most likely missed the aiming point because of the quick change in altitude while on the bomb run.

The rest of the Lead Squadron turned to the left and dropped on the alternate target, Abbeville. The remaining four planes in the High Squadron scattered. Three, No. 139, "Chief Sly II", Cpt Bruce D. Barton, No. 453, "The Bearded Beauty-Mizpah", 1Lt John T. Hardin and No. 497, "Mizpah II", Cpt Robert B. Campbell, dropped near Porix; No. 454, "Motsie", 1Lt William D. Beasley, south of Aimes; and No. 481, "Hell's Angels", 1Lt James D. Baird, "in a field somewhere in France."

German fighters did not come up at the Strike Force and there was no flak over either target. Moderate, but inaccurate flak was encountered as the bomber stream went back over Dnieppe on the way out. No. 337 received only a small hole in the nose. However, there were several mechanical problems during the mission. A spark plug failed in the No. 4 engine. The supercharger on the No. 2 engine ran away and the regulator leaked oil. The controls froze, requiring the combined efforts of Lt Lindsey and copilot, 2Lt George Slivkoff, to fly the aircraft. In spite of these problems, the crew kept the plane in formation and landed safely at Bassingbourn.

The next mission, on the 18th to the submarine pens and docks at Vegesak, on the outskirts of Bremen, Germany, was an important one for VIII Bomber Command. This was the first mission on which the AFCE (Automatic Flight Control Equipment, "autopilot") bombing system was employed. Up to then the bombardier had given maneuver instructions to the pilot on the bomb run. This proved to be ineffective in lining up

accurately on the aiming point. To increase accuracy, the autopilot was connected directly to the Norden bomb sight. The bombardier actually flew the bomber as he adjusted the bomb sight on the bomb run. The pilot turned the plane over to the bombardier at the start of the bomb run, resuming control of the aircraft at bombs away.

For this mission, the 101st PBCW was first in the Strike Force, with the 91st Group leading. The 102nd PBCW followed. Lt Lindsey flew No. 337 on the right wing of the Lead Element of the High Squadron. The Germans were up in force on the 18th, starting their attacks just east of Heliogland Island as the Strike Force came in over the North Sea. The fighters continued their attacks to the target and on the way out, until the bombers were 50 miles clear of the German coast. At least 60 enemy aircraft came at the formation. More than half were FW 190s, with Me 109s, Me 110s, and Ju 88s also harassing the bomber stream.

Three minutes before the target, a Me 109 came in on No. 337 from 0200 O'clock high, approaching to within 250 yards before breaking away at 0500 O'clock. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt Alvin T. Shippang, began firing short bursts at the diving enemy aircraft while 1,000 yards out, continuing to do so as it broke away. The Me 109 spun downward, burst into flames and exploded at about 10,000 feet.

Six minutes after bombs away, a FW 190 dived down on No. 337 from 0200 O'clock high. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt Sebastian Scavello, fired 50 rounds into the aircraft when it was 800 yards away. The German fighter dived past the right wing of the bomber and went straight on down into the ground.

Three minutes later another FW 190 passed No. 337 at 0130 O'clock level. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Joseph A. Rekas, put 50 rounds into the fighter as it passed from 800 to 400 yards away. He whirled the ball turret and fired two more bursts into the fleeing aircraft. The plane dived downward, with parts starting to fly off the fuselage around 20,000 feet. The enemy aircraft went down to the ground.

None of the three fighters scored hits on No. 337. Neither was there any damage from the intense, accurate flak barrage over the target. The only problem No. 337 experienced was failure of the No. 3 engine generator.

No. 337 did not fly the next three missions on the 22nd, 28th and 31st of March. Lt Lindsey's crew flew No. 437, "Franks Nightmare", to Rouen, France on the 28th and was in the same aircraft on a mission to Rotterdam the 31st. The latter mission was recalled from over the continent without dropping because of poor weather conditions at the target.

No. 337 and Lt Lindsey's crew were back in the air again the 4th of April for a mission to the

Renault auto works at the edge of Paris. They flew No. 3 in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. The 102nd PBCW led the Strike Force, with the 305th the Lead Group. The 91st brought up the rear of the 101st PBCW. No enemy aircraft came at the bomber stream on the way in, but the bombers encountered moderately heavy and accurate flak over the target. On the way out, German fighters put in an appearance, first hitting the formation about five miles beyond the target. At least 60 enemy aircraft, both Me 109s and FW 190s, attacked the Strike Force, continuing the harassment until ten miles off the French coast.

Eight minutes after bombs away, a FW 190 came at No. 337 from 0600 O'clock high. The tail gunner, S/Sgt Anthony J. Roy, began firing when the enemy aircraft was 600 yards out. At about 500 yards, the ring cowling came off and at 400 yards, part of the wing flipped away. The aircraft broke straight down when 350 yards out. At that time two more FW 190s appeared to be heading for No. 337. Sgt Roy had to switch his attention to these aircraft in case they attack pressed their attack on No. 337. They did not.

Eight minutes later, yet another FW 190 dived at No. 337, this time from 0600 O'clock high. The radio operator, T/Sgt Lawrence J. Brandenburg, engaged him with the radio compartment gun at 600 yards. He put approximately 50 rounds into the enemy aircraft by the time it was 300 yards away. The fighter began to burn violently, went into a dive and exploded a few hundred yards below and behind the bomber. Both wings were blown off.

Neither fighter scored a hit on No. 337. There were no more fighter attacks. Lt Lindsey brought her back to Bassingbourn with no damage save for a few punctures from empty cartridge cases from other bombers flying above No. 337.

Another wild mission was flown the next day. This time the bombers went to the Erla works, an aircraft and engine repair facility two miles south of Antwerp, Belgium. The facility was turning out 10-20 repaired German fighters per week. Since it was a short run across the Channel to Antwerp, the crews were able to sleep in. Briefing was at 0700 hours with the first aircraft lifting off at 1230 hours.

The 101st PBCW, with the 306th Group leading, led the 1BW on this mission. The 102nd PBCW trailed the 101st. No. 337 and Lt Lindsey flew No. 3 in the Lead Element of the Lead Squadron. The Combat Wings came together on time and formed up correctly. On leaving the assembly point, the Strike Force strayed too far south. This was overcorrected on the flight over the Channel, resulting in the formation passing over the coast about three miles north of where briefed.

Soon after crossing onto the continent approximately 75 German fighters began a vigorous

attack on the bomber stream. The fighters concentrated on the lead 306th Group. The attacks were made from head on, apparently with the intent of disrupting the bomb run. After attacking the 306th, most of the fighters flew over or under the 91st formation to attack the trailing groups.

Four 306th planes went down over the target. In addition, the lead aircraft was hit hard. Aboard were LTC James W. Wilson, flying as Group Lead, and BG Frank A. Armstrong, CO of the 101st PBCW, monitoring how well LTC Wilson handled the job of Wing Lead. Because of all the confusion of planes falling from the formation, the viciousness of the German attacks and hits upon the Lead aircraft, the 306th Group drifted to the right. The bombers flew directly under, 1,000 feet below, and in front of the 91st just as the two Groups started the bomb run.

Even with all the confusion, the 306th lead bombardier, 1Lt Frank D. Yaussi, was able to put his bombs on the target. Unfortunately, none of the other 306th bombardiers was able to drop on his smoke streamer and missed the target. The 91st bombardiers had to delay dropping for 3-5 seconds so as not to hit the 306th Group bombers below them. They, too, missed the target. And, none of the bombs from the following 102nd PBCW hit the target. Most of the bombs fell on populated areas, including the town of Mortsel, where 943 civilians were killed and more than 1,300 injured. The tactics of the German fighter command had served their purpose. Only Lt Yaussi's bombs had hit the target and the Americans suffered a political embarrassment. The Belgium government later filed a protest over the inaccurate bombing by the Americans which resulted in the loss of so many civilian lives.

No. 337 made it through all the fighter attacks with no damage. One FW 190 broke off an attack on a straggling B-17 and turned on No. 337 from 10 O'clock low and then flew level to the bomber as it went by on the left side. The navigator, 2Lt Rocco J. Maiorca, fired on him with the left nose gun. He observed hits at 300 yards out. When only 100 yards away, and alongside, parts of the cockpit cover flew off and the enemy aircraft fell end over end as it went to the ground. The German fighter had not fired on No. 337 as it went by. Lt Lindsey brought his aircraft back to Bassingbourn with no battle damage.

No. 337 seemed to be settling into an effective routine. There had been no serious mechanical problems for several missions now. The ground crew was doing its job and the aircraft was performing well. She had been subject to very little flak damage and only modest harassment from German fighters. All seemed to be going well for Lt Lindsey's crew and No. 337. Unfortunately, this was not to continue.

The next mission on the 17th of April, was one of the worst days of the war for the 91st Bomb Group. On the 17th, the Strike Force was organized into two "wedges", with the 91st leading the Lead 101st PBCW, the 306th flying below and a Composite Group, formed by bombers from the 91st and 306th Groups, "on top" of the wedge. The 102nd PBCW formed a similar wedge that followed the 101st. Lt Lindsey and No. 337 were No. 3 in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron of the Composite Group.

Six of the 29 bombers that went over the continent were shot down. All six were from the 401st Squadron. Only two 401st planes returned from this mission. No. 337 was not one of them.

The flight path took the bombers to the northeast out over the North Sea, over the East Frisian Islands and on into Germany west of Wilhelmshaven and Oldenburg. The IP was at Wildeshausen, five minutes from the target. As soon as the 91st passed over the East Frisian Islands, moderately heavy and accurate, flak came up into the formation. When the planes passed beyond the range of these anti-aircraft guns, German fighters appeared. Me 109s and FW 190s attacked the formation all the way into the target. Me 110 twin-engine fighters stood out beyond the range of the bombers' machine guns and lobbed 20 and 30 mm cannon shells into the formation.

No. 337 made it through the fighter attack and flak over the target without being hit. On the way out to the coast, however, she was hit by fighters that inflicted heavy damage. Still, No. 337 remained in formation. At about 1326 hours, as the aircraft passed 3 miles east of Emden, No. 337 took direct flak hits that knocked out the No. 3 engine and set the No. 4 engine afire. Lt. Lindsey, feathered No. 3 engine. Almost immediately afterward another anti-aircraft shell burst into the cockpit killing both Lt Lindsey and the copilot, 2Lt George Slivkoff. Other flak hits smashed into the aircraft. No. 337 began slowly circling downward in the direction of Norden and the North Sea.

The bombardier, 2Lt Albert Dobsa, was hit in the stomach by one of the flak bursts. The navigator, 2Lt Rocco J. Maiorca, was uninjured. Lt Dobsa sensing the plane was out of control went up into the cockpit to see what was wrong. There he saw both pilots dead in their seats. He looked back into the fuselage and saw crewmen lying on the floor, also apparently dead. Lt Dobsa knew it was time to bail out and went back down into the nose. Lt Maiorca was standing above the nose hatch, hesitating to jump. Lt Dobsa simply pushed him out the hatch and dropped through after him. Lt Dobsa came down in the shallow water on the Frisian Islands beach where he was captured immediately by German troops. Lt Maiorca drifted about a mile out to sea off the Frisian Islands from where he swam ashore. He was in the water three hours and was captured by German

troops upon reaching the shore. No. 337 went on out to sea where she crashed, taking the rest of the crew with her to a cold watery grave. She received credit for ten missions.

The Accounting

So ended the brief careers of the “Short Snorters”. A total of 56 crewmen flew at least one mission on the three bombers. Twenty-eight

crewmen were killed when the three “Short Snorters” went down and two became POWs. Three crewmen who flew in the aircraft subsequently were killed in action, 14 others were shot down and became POWs. One crewman was so badly wounded he had to transfer to ground duties. Eighty-five per cent casualties.

No other plane in the 91st Group was to bear the name “Short Snorter.”



“Short Snorter” bill of S/Sgt James M. Bechtel, 324th Squadron of the 91st Bomb Group. Sgt Bechtel signed the bill along the left margin. Three other Short Snorters countersigned the bill below his name. Sgt Bechtel was killed in action on 28 March 1943 while flying as a fill-in on 1Lt John A. Coen’s crew (see page 138). (Guy Bechtel)

SMELSER HAROLD C	MAJ	324 BOMB SQ 61 BOMB GP/H	TENNESSEE
SMELTZER ELDON L	2 LT	700 BOMB SQ 443 BOMB GP/H	MISSOURI
SMEREK STEVE L	CPL	3206 CIV SV CO	MISSOURI
SMIDY JAMES S	SGT	714 BOMB SQ 448 BOMB GP/H	PENNSYLVANIA
SMILEY CHARLES S	S SGT	334 BOMB SQ 95 BOMB GP/H	OHIO
SMILLIE ROBERT	1 LT	310 FERRY SQ	NEW YORK
SMITH BEMAN E	1 LT	401 BOMB SQ 91 BOMB GP/H	OHIO
SMITH CHARLES H	2 LT	555 BOMB SQ 881 BOMB GP/H	TEXAS
SMITH CLIFFORD H	S SGT	4 BOMB SQ 54 BOMB GP/H	MARYLAND
SMITH DARWIN K	S SGT	325 BOMB SQ 92 BOMB GP/H	PENNSYLVANIA
SMITH EARL G	2 LT	AIR CORPS	CALIFORNIA
SMITH EDWARD A	S SGT	332 BOMB SQ 386 BOMB GP/H	NEW JERSEY
SMITH JESSE E	PFC	625 ORD AM CO	KENTUCKY
SMITH JOHN G	SGT	705 BOMB SQ 446 BOMB GP/H	KANSAS
SMITH JOHN J	SGT	332 BOMB SQ 94 BOMB GP/H	OREGON
SMITH LAWRENCE W JR	S SGT	344 BOMB SQ 384 BOMB GP/H	NEW YORK
SMITH LEMUEL B	1 LT	357 BOMB SQ 305 BOMB GP/H	ALABAMA
SMITH LEONARD H	CPL	IT SIG SV CO	LOUISIANA
SMITH LYNNFORD L	S SGT	332 BOMB SQ 94 BOMB GP/H	OHIO
SMITH MILTON H	2 LT	AIR CORPS	ILLINOIS
SMITH OSIE J	SGT	368 BOMB SQ 390 BOMB GP/H	ARKANSAS
SMITH RICHARD E	1 LT	378 BOMB SQ 392 BOMB GP/H	UTAH
SMITH ROBERT M	S SGT	413 BOMB SQ 96 BOMB GP/H	CONNECTICUT
SMITH RODNEY L JR	2 LT	332 BOMB SQ 94 BOMB GP/H	MASSACHUSETTS
SMITH WALLACE W	PFC	3206 CIV SV CO	MISSOURI
SMITH WILLIAM A	PVT	COAST ARTY CORPS	NEW YORK
SMITH WILLIAM E	S SGT	332 BOMB SQ 94 BOMB GP/H	NEW YORK
SMITH WALLACE M	2 LT	325 FERRY SQ 31 A T GP	MICHIGAN
SNIDER DONALD E	PVT	462 AMPH TRUCK CO	WASHINGTON

Section of the “Wall of the Missing”, the American Cemetery at Madingley, near Cambridge, England. More than 5,000 names of airmen whose remains were never recovered are recorded on the wall. This section includes the name of 1Lt Beman E. Smith, pilot of No. 336, “Short Snorter II”, when she was shot down on 26 February 1943. (Author)



Cpt William H. Arthur, leaving his aircraft and heading for debriefing on 14 August 1944. He had just returned from a mission to an airfield at Metz, France, his 16th combat mission. Bill had 19 more missions to fly. (East Anglia Tourist Board)



Andrew M. Schumacher, ball turret gunner on No. 220, "Little Jean", March 1945. (Andy Schumacher)

Return From Bremen. The Low Squadron is Gone

Working for Uncle Sam

"Bombs Away" rings out over the intercom static of 29 aircraft of the 91st Bomb Group (Heavy). From each olive-drab B-17, five, one thousand pound general purpose bombs break free of their shackles and fall through the open bomb bay doors. Relieved of the weight, the bombers lurch upward. The high explosives stream downward onto the Bremen, Germany Flugzeugbau assembly works of the Focke-Wulf factory 26,000 feet below. The plant produces about 80 Focke-Wulf (FW) 190 fighters each month. FW 190s, along with hoards of Me 109s are wrecking havoc among heavy bomber formations as they penetrate into German airspace.

Many of the bombs explode within the factory itself, destroying at least half of the buildings. Others fall on the adjoining airfield and aircraft dispersal areas. The time is 1259 hours. Planes of the 91st Bomb Group have been in the air for almost three hours. Thus, ends successfully the day's work "for Uncle Sam." From now on the air crews will be working "for themselves." The primary objective of the crewmen for the rest of this day, 17 April 1943, is to return safely to their home base at Bassingbourn, East Anglia, England. A party awaits the returning officers this evening. Local English girls, the crewmen's dates, are already preparing for a night of dancing and general revelry. In a few hours, trucks, "Passion Wagons", will be heading out to nearby villages to pick up the girls and bring them to the airbase.

For today's mission, VIII Bomber Command launched the largest number of heavy bombers it has sent out. Of the 115 aircraft put into the air earlier this morning, 107 made it to the target, another record. But, it has been a rough mission, even for this period of the air war over Germany. Weather over the target was clear, perfect for bombing, putting the Germans on guard as to the possibility of an attack on Bremen. Further, a Luftwaffe reconnaissance plane spotted the American formation while it was still well out over the North Sea. German fighter control was alerted as to the likely target, as well as heading, speed, altitude, and number of bombers in the Strike Force. A welcoming committee of 150 German fighters awaited the formations as they approached the enemy coast.

This is the 69th combat mission the 91st Group has flown since its first foray over the continent on 7 November 1942. The 91st and the 306th, Bomb Groups, comprising the 101st Provisional Combat Wing ("PBCW"), with the 91st in the Lead, were first over the target today. They were followed

by the 305th and 303rd Groups of the 102 PBCW.

The 91st Group put up 32 bombers this morning, the largest force it has mounted to date. The 323rd Squadron, with eight aircraft in the air, led the 91st formation. Maj Paul D. Brown, with Cpt Lawrence P. Dwyer, Jr. as his pilot, in No. 559, "Stupntakit", led the Group. 1Lt John T. Evin's crew in No. 642, "Vulgar Virgin", flew on the right wing of the Lead aircraft. Cpt Charles R. Giauque, in No. 657, was in the No. 3 position of the Lead Element. The Second Element of the Lead Squadron was led by Cpt William R. Clancy in No. 639, "The Careful Virgin." On his right wing was 1Lt Homer C. Biggs, Jr. in No. 475, "Stric-Nine" and on his left wing, No. 077, "Delta Rebel No. 2", with 1Lt George P. Birdsong, Jr. and his crew. 1Lt Robert D. Rand and his crew, in No. 547, "Vertigo", was designated a Group Spare. They flew in the rear, "diamond", position of the Second Element.

Six bombers from the 322nd Squadron formed the High Squadron. Cpt Robert B. Campbell, in No. 990, "Dame Satan", was Lead of the High Squadron. The No. 2 position in the Lead Element was filled by 1Lt William H. Broley's crew in No. 789, "Golden Bear." 1Lt John T. Hardin, in No. 453, "The Bearded Beauty-Mizpath", was on Cpt Campbell's left wing. The Second Element was led by Cpt Bruce D. Barton's crew in No. 483, "Spirit of Alcohol." On his right wing was 1Lt James D. Baird in No. 481, "Hell's Angels", with No. 712, "Heavyweight Annihilators No. 2", and 1Lt Don C. Bader's crew in the No. 3 position.

The 401st Squadron sent out nine planes. Six of the aircraft formed the Low Squadron. The first Element was led by Capt Oscar D. O'Neill and his crew flying in No. 070, "Invasion 2nd." On his right wing, in the No. 2 position, was No. 172, "Thunderbird", with 1Lt Harold H. Beasley's crew aboard. Lt Beasley's regular plane, No. 132, "Royal Flush!", had been damaged by German fighters during a mission to Paris on the 4th of April. While "Royal Flush!" is being repaired, Lt Beasley and his crew have been assigned "Thunderbird." This is their second mission in the aircraft. Lt Beasley's regular copilot, 1Lt Oscar F. Deithering, has been stood down for the mission. A new first pilot, 1Lt Walter L. McCain, is flying in the right seat to gain combat experience before taking out his own crew. Lt McCain and his crew arrived at Bassingbourn on the 3rd of April. Two of Lt McCain's crewmen also were sent up today, 2Lt Mathew Michaels, bombardier, with Lt Beasley and 2Lt Maurice J. Herman, navigator, with 1Lt Earl E. Riley.

On Lt O'Neill's left wing, the No. 3 position, was 1Lt Robert B. Walker's crew in No. 391, "Rain of Terror." There was a shortage of qualified bombardiers in the 91st Bomb Group today. A 322nd Squadron administrative first sergeant, George O. Zedonek, volunteered to fly as a toggler. In so doing he had to take a temporary reduction in rank to S/Sgt. He is flying with Lt Walker. This is Sgt Zedonek's first combat mission.

The Second Element of the Low Squadron was led by Lt Riley in No. 763, "Bomb Boogie." His copilot, 2Lt Neil A. Daniels, is the copilot on 1Lt Buster Peek's crew, who arrived on the 3rd of April. On Lt Riley's right wing was 1Lt John W. Wilson and crew in No. 459, "Hellsapoppin." The left wing of the Second Element was 1Lt Nichalos P. Stoffel and crew in No. 574, "Skywolf II." Lt Stoffel is the regular copilot on 1Lt Bill M. Martin's crew. Lt Martin and his crew are members of the 92nd Bomb Group (Heavy) stationed at Alconbury Air Field. Several crews from the 92nd are on detached service with the 91st and are flying out of Bassingbourn, using 91st Group aircraft. All are experienced crews. Lt Martin was transferred back to Alconbury yesterday. Lt Stoffel has moved over into the left seat as first pilot. Lt Stoffel is experienced at flying from this seat. For the last several missions, Lts Martin and Stoffel have been alternating as first pilot. For today's mission, the 92nd Group Assistant Operations Office, Cpt Robert A. Foster, is flying his first mission to obtain combat experienced. He is flying as copilot for Lt Stoffel.

Another 323rd Squadron plane, No. 399, "Man-O-War", was designated as a Group spare for the mission. "Man-O-War" was assigned the "diamond position" of the Second Element of the 401st Low Squadron. The crew aboard "Man-O-War" is that of 2Lt Lowell L. Walker, Jr., another 92nd Bomb Group crew on detached service with the 91st.

Three additional aircraft and crews from the 401st Squadron were sent up, along with a three-plane element from the 322nd Squadron, to form a Composite Low Squadron in a Composite Group, designated the "104th Group" for this mission. The three 401st planes comprised the Lead Element of this Low Composite Squadron. The Element Lead was No. 484, "Bad Egg", with Cpt John W. Carroll and his crew aboard. On her right wing was 1Lt Donald H. Frank's crew in No. 437, "Frank's Nightmare" and on the left wing, No. 337, "Short Snorter III", with 1Lt Nathan F. Lindsey and crew. In the lead of the Second Element was Cpt Kenneth K. Wallick from the 322nd Squadron in No. 178, "The Old Standby." A third 92nd Group crew, with 1Lt McGehee Word as first pilot, was on his right wing in a 322nd plane, No. 057, "Piccadilly Commando." 1Lt William F. Genheimer's crew from the 322nd

Squadron, in No. 497, "Frisco Jinny", was in the No. 3 position, on his left wing.

Six planes of the 324th Squadron formed the High Squadron of the Composite Group. The Lead Element of the 324th Squadron was led by 1Lt James. A. Verinis flying in No. 069, "Our Gang." On his right wing was Maj D. G. Alford in No. 527, "The Great Speckled Bird" and in the No. 3 position, 1Lt James M. Smith in No. 053, "Desperate Journey." The Second Element was led by Cpt Robert K. Morgan in No. 485, "Memphis Belle." In the No. 2 position was Lt Charles W. Freschauf in No. 487, "Ritzy Blitz", and on his left wing, 1Lt Clayton L. Anderson, in No. 480, "The Bad Penny." Six planes from the 369th Squadron of the 306th Bomb Group, stationed at nearby Thurleigh, formed the Lead Squadron of the Composite Group. Maj Henry W. Terry, Jr. of the 306th Group led the Composite Group. Thirteen months to the day later, on 17 May 1944, Maj, then Col, Terry would assume command of the 91st Bomb Group.

The 91st Group Lead aircraft, "Stupntakit" of 323rd Squadron had lifted off at 0956 hours. Other planes followed at approximately 30-second intervals, the last one, No. 399, "Man-O-War", left the runway at 1008 hours. There was considerable ground haze at Bassingbourn during take off, reducing visibility to between one and two miles. In spite of this the pilots did not experience serious problems in forming up on the Group Lead and heading for the Wing rendezvous with the 306th Group. Weather conditions over the prescribed route to the target were the best they had been for the past month. Although a general ground haze covered the continent and cloud patches were prevalent at 6,000, 14,000 and 20,000 feet over most of the route, at no place did cloud cover exceed 5/10 density. Still, it required considerable skill, and a little luck, for the lead navigator, Cpt Charles F. Maas, to identify check points along the route.

The flight path took the bombers to the northeast out over the North Sea, over the East Frisian Islands and on into Germany west of Wilhelmshaven and Oldenburg. Check points along way were Baltrum Island, Edeweicht, Ahlhorn, and the IP (Initial Point, beginning of the bomb run) at Wildeshausen. The IP was 5 minutes from the target. The prescribed rate of climb to bombing altitude while over the North Sea was very fast. The bombers had to move from 6,000 feet to 26,000 feet in 32 minutes. This placed considerable stress on the heavily loaded bombers. Two aircraft encountered problems because of the fast rate of climb. "Bomb Boogie", Lead of the Second Element of the 401st Low Squadron, developed a fuel pressure problem in the No. 2 engine, the No. 4 engine began running rough and the radio compass went out. Lt Riley had

to turn back at 1225 hours, about 70 miles north of the East Frisian Islands. "Bomb Boogie" landed back at Bassingbourn at 1510 hours. Upon the departure of "Bomb Boogie", Lt Walker flying in the rear of this element, moved "Man-O-War" up to become Element Lead.

A 322nd Squadron crew in the Composite Group, Lt Word's "Piccadilly Commando", also had to return to base. After test firing his .50 caliber left waist machine gun, S/Sgt Edward A. Murphy lifted the gun back into the aircraft to make adjustments. In doing so, he accidentally hit the trigger causing the gun to run away inside the fuselage. He shot up the stabilizer, knocked the oxygen system out and nearly hit the tail gunner, S/Sgt Marvin E. Dyer. Lt Word turned back at 1230 hours, 15 miles NW of Baltrum Island.

Another 322nd Squadron plane had to abort the mission. "The Bearded Beauty-Mizpah", with Lt Hardin in the No. 3 position of the Lead Element of the 322nd High Squadron of the 91st formation, turned back at 1236 hours, about 10 miles SE of Juist Island in the East Frisian Islands. The oil line to No. 2 engine broke and the No. 4 turbocharger went out because of the stress from the rapid rate of climb to bombing altitude. Lt Hardin returned to base at 1615 hours. Lt Rand moved his Spare aircraft, "Vertigo", up into the space vacated by Lt Hardin.

As the Group crossed over onto the continent, 29 of the 32 bombers that left Bassingbourn remained in the Strike Force. Eight 401st Squadron planes went over the continent, five in the Low Squadron of the 91st formation and three in the Low Squadron of the Composite Group.

As the 91st passed over the East Frisian Islands moderately heavy, and accurate, flak came up at the formation. None of the 91st Group planes received serious hits. As soon as the planes passed beyond the range of these anti-aircraft guns, German fighters appeared. The fighters did not at first charge into the bomber stream, but gradually picked up the tempo of runs at the bombers until the IP, Wildeshausen, by which time they were mounting vicious attacks upon the intruding aircraft. All the while flak continued to come up at the Strike Force from Aurica, Oldenburg, Alhorn, Wildeshausen, and of course, Bremen.

Nearly every type of fighter available to the Luftwaffe came at the Strike Force. Most were with Me 109s, but a number of FW 190s also attacked the bombers. Although the majority of the enemy aircraft stormed in on the bombers from between 1000 O'clock and 0200 O'clock high, attacks were made from almost every conceivable direction. Many of the passes were made by "javelin" formations of several enemy aircraft flying in line directly through the bomber formation. Others swarmed at the bombers in elements of three. Me

110 twin-engine fighters engaged the bombers at a distance of over 1,000 yards, beyond the protective range of the machine guns of the bombers, firing 20 and 30 mm cannon shells at the planes. Twin-engine Ju 88s were believed to have dropped aerial bombs into the formation from above. No fewer than 125 single engine and 25 twin-engine enemy aircraft were estimated to have engaged the Strike Force.

Cpt Maas could not see the IP because of the haze, but rather than diverting to the alternate target, he turned at the estimated time he was supposed to turn on the IP and hoped for the best. He was accurate. Bremen appeared directly ahead and the bomb run was on course.

The heaviest fighter attacks were experienced at the beginning of the flak barrage at Bremen. Fighters continued coming at the bombers over the target as enemy pilots ignored the exploding flak. It appeared to the bomber crews that the enemy attacks were planned to drive Lead Elements of the Squadrons off the bomb run, after the Group had been committed to the run, so as to render the bombing inaccurate. Many of German pilots pressed their attacks to within 25 yards of the bombers before breaking off. In spite of persistent flak along the route in to the target and intensifying fighter attacks on the 91st formation as the Group approached the target, all 91st planes that crossed the enemy coast remained with the formation to go over the target.

Just after leaving the IP, and beginning the bomb run, "Sky Wolf II" received flak hits and was attacked head-on by German fighters. The windshields in front of both pilots were shattered. Fighters were queuing up off to the left of the bomber, darting ahead, turning over on their backs, and circling back in head-on attacks. Others were coming in from all positions. Some of the enemy aircraft came so close Lt Stoffel and Maj Foster could see their eyes. Crewmen literally were screaming out directions of incoming fighters over the intercom. One 20 mm shell came through the nose of the plane and exploded in the bulkhead just in front of the pilots' legs, severely wounding the bombardier, 2Lt Everet A. Coppage, in the buttocks. A piece of shell went on through the nose compartment and into the flight deck, hitting Cpt Foster in the right leg, causing a gaping wound. Cpt Foster felt as if he had been kicked very hard in the leg. Blood was flowing freely from the wound. Lt Stoffel was also wounded in the left leg by the exploding shell. Cpt Foster believed his wound was serious and bleeding so freely he needed immediate medical attention. He went down into the nose to bail out, hoping the Germans would find him quickly and get him to a hospital. When he discovered he did not have his chute on, he returned to the cockpit and removed the chest pack from

under his seat. Cpt Foster snapped it on and went back down to the nose and bailed out.

After floating free for a short while, he pulled the rip cord. It came loose in his hand. Cpt Foster had to pull the canopy out of the pack by hand. While descending, Cpt Foster took his oxygen mask hose and tied it around his right leg to slow the blood still flowing from his wound. He landed heavily in a field and lay there, unable to get up because of his injured leg. A group of angry farmers came running at him from one direction and a small open vehicle with military men in it from the other. The military won and he was taken prisoner. Cpt Foster was taken to a hospital in Oldenburg where he remained for almost five months while his leg healed. At that time he was moved to the Center Compound at Stalag Luft 3.

"Sky Wolf II" continued on to the target, with Lt Stoffel handling the controls alone. She took more flak hits on the bomb run. The No. 1 engine was set afire while 20 mm cannon fire ripped through the rest of the plane. Much of the electrical system was knocked out, along with structural damage to the wings and fuselage. Still, "Sky Wolf II" remained in formation.

The Composite Group also remained intact to the target. The only change was that of the remaining two planes in the 322nd Squadron Element. In the confusion of evasive actions in response to fighter attacks, Lt. Genheimer and "Frisco Jinny" moved ahead of Lt Wallick in "The Old Standby", who ended up flying on Lt Genheimer's right wing. As the two aircraft turned on the IP, 20 mm cannon fire blasted into the top turret of "Frisco Jinny." The gunner, T/Sgt Roland E. Hale, was hit in the middle of the back, killing him instantly. In spite of the damage to "Frisco Jinny", the two 322nd Squadron planes continued over the target, dropping with the rest of the formation.

Only two bombers from the entire Strike Force, both from the 306th Group, were lost en route to the target.

Except for "Ritzy Blitz", of the 324th High Squadron of the Composite Group, the 91st bombers dropped all their bombs on the target. Three bombs hung up when the bombardier of "Ritzy Blitz", 2Lt R. W. Stephenson, toggled over the target. He eventually was able to salvo the three remaining bombs, causing them to fall on Ochtelbur, at 1329 hours, on the return leg of the mission.

Flak over the target was intense, the most concentrated barrage the Group had encountered on any mission up to then. The crews were briefed that morning that there were an estimated 496 anti-aircraft batteries around Bremen. This appeared to be an accurate assessment. However many batteries there really were, the guns put up a solid box of

exploding 88 mm and 105 mm shells. The resulting flak formed a massive black cloud of steel shards over the target.

Working for Themselves

The trip home proved to be a nightmare for the 401st Squadron. After bombs away, the prescribed route out of Germany started with a 90 degree right turn off the target, heading south into a sweeping right turn just north of Vilsen, angling back over Wildeshausen, and then to Ahlhorn. From there the bomber stream made a straight-line run out of Germany, passing east of Emden, west of Aurich and onto the North Sea over the west end of Juist Island of the Frisians.

The enemy aircraft did not break off their attacks on the 91st until the Group had left the enemy coast and was about 40 miles out over the North Sea. At this time the Strike Force was picked up by a formation of 12 British Spitfires which escorted the bombers back to England. Only two 401st bombers, both from the Composite Group, were still in the air when the Strike Force was met by the protecting British fighters.

What follows is the sequence of events involving planes of the 401st Squadron as the Group fought its way from Bremen back to the safety of the North Sea.

The Low Squadron

No. 070, "Invasion 2nd"

While over the target "Invasion 2nd" took flak hits and was attacked by German fighters. Three fighters came in head-on at 1200 O'clock level. They shot off completely the front of the No. 2 engine. The left wing and fuselage were also hit, turning the bomber into a fiery inferno. "Invasion 2nd" was on her way down. Cpt O'Neill rang the bail-out bell and called out over the intercom for the crew to leave the aircraft. The ball turret gunner, T/Sgt Benedict B. Borostowski, came up into the fuselage from the ball turret and went to the partly open waist door. The door was jammed and would not open further. The waist gunners, S/Sgts William B. King, left waist, and Eldon R. Lapp, right waist, were sitting in front of the door, unable to squeeze out. Sgt Borostowski stepped up and one at a time put a foot between their shoulders, and in turn, pushed both gunners through the narrow opening. The others in the rear of the aircraft had already left. The tail gunner, S/Sgt Aaron S. Youell, dropped through his tail escape hatch. The radio operator, S/Sgt Charles J. Melchiondo, and the flight engineer, T/Sgt Harry Goldstein, went out through the bomb bay. There was no one left to push Sgt Borostowski out. So, he went to the tail escape hatch and dropped out. The rest of the crew, including

Cpt O'Neill and the copilot, 1Lt Robert W. Freihofer, bailed out through the nose hatch. The bombardier, Cpt Edwin R. Bush, detached the Norden bombsight and tossed it out the escape hatch before following the navigator, Cpt Edwin M. Carmichael, through the opening.

"Invasion 2nd" crashed landed itself in an almost perfect landing on the ground near Oldenburg. Five planes were left in the Low Squadron.

No. 459, "Hellsapoppin"

The next 401st Low Squadron plane to go down was "Hellsapoppin." Three or four minutes after the target there was a very hard jolt under the left side of the plane, close in to the fuselage. An anti-aircraft shell had exploded just under "Hellsapoppin." Flak ripped into the left front side of the aircraft, flaking off chunks of metal from the fuselage and throwing them through the interior of the plane. At the same time, three feet of the right wing tip was blown off by a flak burst. A one and one-half foot hole appeared in the nose compartment and all the nose window Plexiglas blew out. There was fire in the left wing and nose compartment. The radio room became engulfed in fire from broken oxygen lines.

The pilot, Lt Wilson, was wounded in the head and the copilot, 1Lt Arthur A. Bushnell, in the right eye, both legs, left arm, and right hand by flying aluminum. In the nose, the bombardier, 1Lt Harold Romm, was hit in the left leg by flak. Earlier, before the target, Lt Romm had been hit in the same leg by a machine gun bullet during an attack by a FW 190.

In the top turret, the flight engineer, T/Sgt Norman L. Thompson, felt the jolt and when he looked out, saw the left wing on fire. He had just seen a fighter off the left wing going after a plane below and was afraid it would come back up at "Hellsapoppin." The enemy fighter was about 15 feet too low for Sgt Thompson to deflect his top turret guns to get off a burst. Since the intercom was shot out, Sgt Thompson was not certain what was happening to the plane. He stepped down from the turret and went into the cockpit. There he saw both pilots with their oxygen masks off and blood pouring out from under their helmets. He assumed both were dead. Sgt Thompson had not heard any firing from the gunners since "Hellsapoppin" had left the target. He figured they either had been killed by the flak and fighters or were too seriously injured to move. From the intensity of the fire, he knew "Hellsapoppin" could explode any second. Sgt Thompson took a final glance at the instruments to ensure the plane was still in level flight. He went back to the bomb bay and opened the doors, which still operated. After checking below and seeing

there was no plane under him, Sgt Thompson dropped out.

Almost immediately after Sgt Thompson bailed out, the plane broke in two at the radio room. Four others some how or other managed to escape the aircraft, Lts Bushnell, Barton, and Romm and the radio operator, T/Sgt Howard A. Earney. All were wounded. The rest of the crew remained trapped in the falling aircraft.

"Hellsapoppin" crashed 20 miles south of Bremen. Four planes were left in the Low Squadron.

No. 172, "Thunderbird"

"Thunderbird", also was hit hard by flak over the target and limped along only a few minutes longer than did "Hellsapoppin." "Thunderbird" took two direct hits on the No. 3 and 4 engines. The right wing was set ablaze immediately with burning oil. There was also fire in the radio room and bomb bay. Lt Beasley hit the fire extinguisher switch. Nothing.

The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt James L. Branch, looked up into all the fire, and knew "Thunderbird" was in serious trouble. He figured it was time to get out. Sgt Branch had been hit in the corner of an eye with a piece of shrapnel and blood covered the eye. He called Lt Beasley over the intercom and asked if he could come up into the fuselage. Lt Beasley told him he could. After getting out of the turret, Sgt Branch grabbed a fire extinguisher and went up to the radio room and bomb bay, but could not extinguish the fires. Lt Beasley then asked Sgt Branch to go to the rear of the plane to see if everyone was out. He had already rung the bail-out bell. Sgt Branch went to the rear of the fuselage and saw that the tail gunner, S/Sgt Johnnie Cagle, had bailed out through the tail hatch. He then told the waist gunners "to get back there", to the waist hatch, and went up and told the radio operator, T/Sgt Jay M. Franklin, "get your ass back there and bail out." Sgt Franklin started back, but passed out in the door of the radio compartment, apparently from lack of oxygen. Sgt Branch and the right waist gunner, S/Sgt Everett L. Creason, picked him up and threw him out, assuming he would come to and open his chute when he fell to where the oxygen was adequate. He did. Sgt Creason bailed out and Sgt Branch called up to the pilot to tell him everyone else was out and he was leaving. After leaving the aircraft, Sgt Branch opened his chute and looked up. He saw "Thunderbird" rise up on its back, turn up on its nose and go straight down to the ground.

While all this was going on in the rear of the aircraft, the flight engineer, T/Sgt Mark L. Schaefer, came down from the top turret and stood in back of the pilot and copilot to assist them in getting control of the aircraft. He saw Lt Beasley push the control

column all the way forward and then pull it all the way back. No response! The controls were shot out. Lt Beasley and the copilot, Lt McCain, were getting ready to get out of their seats and snap on their chutes as Sgt Schaefer went down to the nose hatch and bailed out.

As the action had begun to develop, the bombardier, 2Lt Mathew Michaels, who was on his first mission, saw puffs of black smoke around the aircraft. He thought to himself, "This must be what they had told us about." Just then "Thunderbird" took direct flak hits in the right wing. Lt Beasley rang the bail-out bell, which Lt Michaels mistakenly took to be only a warning. While Lt Michaels was waiting for the second bail-out bell to ring, the navigator, 1Lt Harry D. Sipe, headed for the nose hatch and bailed out. At that time a fighter appeared along side the bomber. Lt Michaels fired at him with the side gun, but missed. "Thunderbird" immediately afterwards started spinning downward. A case of .50 caliber machine gun ammunition pinned Lt Michaels to the top of the nose compartment. He heard glass breaking as his head crunched against one of the windows. A fighter came in on "Thunderbird" from head on, blowing away part of the nose with 20 mm cannon fire. The next thing Lt Michaels knew he was floating free of the plane. Either he had been blown out the nose when the 20 mm cannon shells hit or was stunned by the explosion and did not remember going out the nose hatch. He was still fairly high up and pulled his rip cord in time to float safely to the ground.

Lts Beasley and McCain must have been locked into the plane as it nosed over and dived downward. Their bodies were discovered by the Germans in the wreckage of "Thunderbird."

"Thunderbird" crashed about 20 miles southwest of Bremen. Three planes were left in the Low Squadron.

No. 574, "Sky Wolf II"

Although "Sky Wolf II" had been hit hard on the bomb run and the No. 1 engine was on fire, Lt Stoffel kept her in position over the target. The bombardier, Lt Coppage, toggled the bombs with the rest of the Squadron. As soon as the Group turned off the target and was just beyond the edge of the flak barrage, more enemy aircraft jumped "Sky Wolf II." Another 20 mm shell hit the nose throwing Plexiglas into the face of Lt Coppage, causing severe, profusely bleeding, wounds. The navigator, 1Lt John F. Segrest, Jr., who had also suffered wounds in both legs and his shoulder, told Lt Coppage he needed immediate medical attention and should bail out. He then helped Lt Coppage out the nose hatch. Although alive when he left the aircraft, Lt Coppage did not survive.

Lt Segrest then went up into the cockpit to help Lt Stoffel fly the plane. They flew along for about five minutes when more fighters came at them. "Sky Wolf II" took a direct 20 mm cannon shell hit that knocked out all the controls. Lt Stoffel rang the bail-out bell and said to Lt Segrest, "Let's go." Both officers went down to the nose hatch and bailed out.

The electrical system to the ball turret was not active and the gunner, Sgt Carl H. Quist, could not rotate around to get out. He remained trapped in the falling aircraft. The tail gunner, Sgt Mathew C. Medina, had not been heard over the intercom for some time. He apparently was either dead or so badly injured he could not bail out. Sgt Medina also went down with "Sky Wolf II."

"Sky Wolf II" crashed 10 miles south of Aurich, in Ostfriesland, Germany. Two planes were left in the Low Squadron.

No. 391, "Rain of Terror"

"Rain of Terror" was hit by flak as well as by Me 109 and FW 190 fighter cannon fire over the target, setting the aircraft afire. The bombs had just dropped and the toggler, Sgt Zedoneck, was turning the plane back over to Lt Walker when more flak hit the aircraft. The bomb bay doors were still open. Lt Walker and the copilot, F/O Robert A. Vetter, managed to keep the plane with the formation in spite of the fire. On the way to the coast, a fighter made a pass over top of the bomber, wounding the top turret gunner, T/Sgt Robert F. Flanagan. The tail gunner, S/Sgt Nick Sandoff, most likely was killed during this attack. The radio operator, T/Sgt Gust E. Collias, saw him slumped over in the tail.

As "Rain of Terror" continued towards the North Sea, the fires became more intense and Lt Walker and F/O Vetter no longer could keep her in the air. Lt Walker told Sgt Collias that there was fire in the cockpit and for the crew to leave the aircraft. The aft crew bailed out, Sgt Collias going out through the bomb bay. Sgt Collias did not see the left waist gunner, S/Sgt Donald J. Snell, in the plane when he bailed out. He assumed Sgt Snell had already gone out the waist door. Whatever the circumstances, Sgt Snell did not survive. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Raymond C. Ottman, came up from the turret and went out the waist hatch. He had been hit in the buttocks and back during the fighter attacks.

The toggler, Sgt Zedoneck, and the navigator, 1Lt Roy W. Scott, bailed out the nose hatch. Sgt Zedoneck landed in a tree, severely straining his back. German farmers spotted him and turned him over to the military. Lt Scott fell softly to the ground about two miles SW of Bremen. The two pilots remained with the plane in spite of the

increasing intensity of fire within the aircraft. "Rain of Terror" continued losing altitude. The pilots finally made a crash-landing on the beach north of Norden. They both survived to become POWs.

All 401st planes were gone now from the Low Squadron. Only the 323rd aircraft, No. 399, "Man-O-War", flown by the 92nd Bomb Group crew, was left. Lt Walker formed up with another Squadron for protection. The Low Squadron was no more.

Composite Group

In the composite group, No. 337, "Short Snorter III", made it through the flak over the target without being hit. On the way out to the coast she was attacked by fighters, inflicting heavy damage on the aircraft. Still, "Short Snorter III" remained in formation. At 1326 hours, as the aircraft passed 3 miles east of Emden, "Short Snorter III" took direct flak hits that knocked out the No. 3 engine and set the No. 4 engine afire. The pilot, Lt. Lindsey, feathered the No. 3 engine. Almost immediately afterwards another anti-aircraft shell burst into the cockpit killing both Lt Lindsey and the copilot, 2Lt George Slivkoff. More flak hits smashed into the aircraft. "Short Snorter III" began slowly circling downward in the direction of Norden and the North Sea.

The bombardier, 2Lt Albert Dobsa, was hit in the stomach by one of the flak bursts. The navigator, 2Lt Rocco J. Maiorca, was uninjured. Lt Dobsa, sensing the plane was out of control, went up into the cockpit to see what was wrong. There he saw both pilots dead in their seats. He looked back into the fuselage and saw crewmen lying on the floor, also apparently dead. Lt Dobsa knew it was time to bail out and went back down into the nose. Lt Maiorca was standing above the nose hatch, hesitating to jump. Lt Dobsa simply pushed him out the hatch and dropped through after him. Lt Dobsa came down in the shallow water on the Frisian Islands beach where he was captured immediately by German troops. Lt Maiorca drifted about a mile out to the sea off the Frisian Islands from where he swam ashore. He was in the water three hours and was taken captive by German troops upon reaching the shore.

"Short Snorter III", went on out to sea where she crashed, taking the rest of the crew with her to a cold watery grave. Only two of the seven 401st planes, Nos. 484, "Bad Egg", and 437, "Frank's Nightmare", that had gone over the continent were still flying. "Frank's Nightmare" had only six machine gun bullet holes in the right stabilizer. Lt Frank landed her at 1556 hours. The "Bad Egg" had one of the tail guns disabled by a flak burst and several flak holes in the fuselage. She touched down at Bassingbourn at 1615 hours.

Of the twenty-one returning aircraft in the other three Squadrons, three sustained heavy damage. The top turret of No. 497, "Frisco Jinny", was blown out by the 20 mm cannon shell that killed Sgt Hale. The other two bombers with major damage were from the 323rd Squadron. No. 077, "Delta Rebel No. 2", with Lt Birdsong, was hit hard. A 20 mm cannon shell exploded in the nose, knocking out most of the glass, damaging the Norden bomb sight and wounding the bombardier, 1Lt Robert G. Abb, in the hand. The No. 1 engine was also hit. No. 475, "Stric-Nine", flown by 1Lt Homer C. Briggs, Jr., was raked by 20 mm cannon fire as it came off the target. The No. 4 engine and the oxygen system on the left side were shot out. "Stric-Nine" landed at Hethel to refuel before going on to Bassingbourn.

The remaining 91st planes returned safely to England. No. 789, "Golden Bear", of the 322nd Squadron landed at Shipham Airdrome to refuel. The last plane in formation going straight on into to Bassingbourn, No. 481, "Hell's Angels", of the 322nd, with Lt Baird at the controls, touched down at 1636 hours. The sky was clear of bombers. The 401st ground crews milled around with looks of disbelief on their faces. Only three of the nine Squadron planes that had taken off six and a half earlier, were now sitting on their hardstands. One of these had aborted over the channel and did not go over the continent. Fifty 401st crewmen, along with ten men of the 92nd Group flying in the 401st Squadron, were missing. Eventually it would be learned that 32 had been killed, 28 surviving to become POWs. While accustomed to losses, so many on one mission and all from one squadron had a demoralizing effect on all crewmen of the 91st Bomb Group, flight and ground alike.

Morale was no better over in the 306th Bomb Group at Thurleigh. Ten of the two dozen planes the Group had put up today were shot down. Five of the six planes in the High Squadron and three of four in the Low Squadron were lost. Thirty-four crewmen were killed and 66 became POWs. Planes of the 369th Squadron of the 306th flying in the Composite Group were hit hard by flak and fighters, but none of these bombers went down. On today's mission to Bremen, all 16 bombers lost from the Strike Force, of the 107 that made it over the continent, were from the 91st and 306th Groups.

The Aftermath

Of the 233 crewmen of the 91st Group who returned to Bassingbourn from Germany today, 42 later would be killed in action, 31 others would become POWs--31.3% casualties. This is about normal for this period of the war, especially given many of the crewmen flying today had only a few more missions to go to complete their quota of 25.

The future for the bombers of the 91st Group that survived the day will be even bleaker. Eighteen of the twenty-three returning B-17s will be shot down within a few months time. Three will be so badly damaged, they will be placed in salvage and cannibalized for spare parts. One will be declared unfit for combat service and transferred to the Aphrodite program. There she will be filled with explosives and sent as a flying bomb to the V-1, "Buzz Bomb", site at Mimoyecques, France. She will be blown to bits, but will miss her target. A total of 80 crewmen flying on the last mission of these bombers will be killed in action, 92 will become prisoners of war. Another 19 crewmen who will be shot down, will evade capture.

William Wyler, the Hollywood movie director, has been at Basingbourn for several weeks filming combat action for a documentary dealing with VIII Bomber Command for the Army Air Corps. His intention is to base the documentary on the plane and crew first to complete 25 missions. The Army plans to have the crew fly their plane back to the States for a public relations tour to encourage sales of war bonds. The plane Maj Wyler had selected and had been filming around was "Invasion 2nd", the crew, Cpt Oscar D. O'Neill's. Today was Cpt O'Neill's 24th mission.

With the loss of "Invasion 2nd" and Cpt O'Neill's crew, Maj Wyler will have to select another plane and crew. He will pick No. 485, "Memphis Belle", and Cpt Robert K. Morgan's crew of the 324th Squadron. "Memphis Belle" will fly her final

mission on 19 May, Cpt Morgan's crew having completed their 25th mission two days earlier. "Memphis Belle" will be put on orders to return to the U. S. Cpt Morgan and his crew will leave with her on 13 June. "Memphis Belle" will be the only plane that flew today to survive the war. She also will be one of the very few B-17s that flew combat to escape the recycler after the war. "Memphis Belle" eventually will come to reside on public display in Memphis, Tennessee, the city of her name.

The party this evening will go on as scheduled. Approximately 200 officers and 150 service and civilian guests will congregate in No. 1 Mess. The effects of the events of the day will cast an ominous gloomy shadow over the evening. This sense of despair will be heightened by the presence of girls whose dates are among the missing. A few will find other escorts. Many will simply stand around watching the dancing until time for the trucks to take them back to their villages. Late in the evening many of the officers, who will have indulged too freely of the alcohol, will become unruly, creating considerable disturbance. This behavior is understandable, given the pent-up frustration of losing so many friends, and knowing that very likely they may be next. Eventually order will be restored. The men will retire to their billets, the girls will be returned to their homes.

There will be other bad missions, other parties, other dates, and other missing escorts. The losses will go on, the parties will go on, the war will go on. There are 271 missions yet to be flown.



No. 459, "Hellsapoppin", waiting to take off on 17 April 1943. Three hours later, she was shot down. 1Lt John W. Wilson and four of his crew were killed; five others became POWs. (Norman Thompson)

One Came Home. The Stories of Those Left Behind

Bassingbourn, East Anglia, England, home of the 91st Bomb Group (Heavy), 0830 hours Double British Summer Time, 19 May 1943. Briefing over, flight crews begin arriving at their stations for today's raid on the submarine pens at Keil, Germany. The crewmen professionally go about the routine tasks of checking out their equipment in preparation for taking off. There is the accompanying stomach churning, bladder tightening anxiety and building dread as the crewmen try to suppress what lies ahead for them today. This is difficult to do. Casualty rates are exorbitant during these early months of flying combat missions over the continent. In mid 1943 every mission is a trial by fire. The expectation of returning to base is not high. Approximately one in three crewmen survive the 25 mission quota. Still, the 91st Group has not lost a plane to enemy action on the last two missions. Three missions ago, on the 14th of May, No. 481, "Hell's Angels", of the 322nd Squadron went down in the North Sea on her return from a mission to the same target as today. All ten of 1Lt William H. Broley's crew perished.

Maj William Wyler, while not in any personal danger, likewise is apprehensive as he observes crews readying their aircraft for today's mission. Maj Wyler and a group of photographers have been at Bassingbourn for the past few months filming air combat from which he will produce a documentary film describing the commitments and dedication of airmen of VIII Bomber Command as they participate in the air war over Europe. The documentary is to feature the first plane and crew in VIII Bomber Command to complete 25 missions. In addition to the film, the Army plans to send the crew and plane back to the States. There they will tour the country as a part of a publicity campaign for War Bond drives and support of the air war.

Maj Wyler originally had planned to focus on No. 070, "Invasion 2nd" of the 401st Squadron, along with Cpt Oscar D. O'Neill and his crew. Unfortunately, "Invasion 2nd" and Cpt O'Neill's crew were shot down while flying to the Focke-Wulf plant at Bremen, Germany on 17 April. Maj Wyler then selected another plane and crew as the principals of his documentary. After considering planes and crews in the 91st Bomb Group who were approaching their 25th mission, Maj Wyler settled on No. 485, "Memphis Belle" and the crew of Cpt Robert K. Morgan in the 324th Squadron. The cameramen flew more missions to film "Memphis Belle" and her crew in combat.

Two days ago, on a mission to Lorient, France, Cpt Morgan and his crew completed their

personal quotas of 25 missions. The crew is now stood down from flying combat. But, "Memphis Belle" is one mission short of 25. Today she is on the mission list to complete her 25th and final mission. She will be flown by 1Lt Clayton L. Anderson's crew. Much is riding on their successful completion of the mission. If "Memphis Belle" returns safely, Maj Wyler can wind up the final filming and return to Hollywood to edit the documentary. Cpt Morgan and his crew will fly "Memphis Belle" back to the States. If she does not return, Maj Wyler will have to select another plane and crew as "stars" for the documentary. And, additional combat filming will be required. This not only would delay completion of the project, but would subject Maj Wyler and his cameramen to additional danger. Already, one cameraman, Lt Harold J. Tannenbaum, has been lost in the air over Europe while working on the project.

Two missions are being flown from Bassingbourn today. Two squadrons, the 331st and 332nd, of the 94th Bomb Group have been stationed at Bassingbourn for training and flying combat missions since mid April. The Group's permanent airbase at Bury St. Edmunds is being put in order and awaiting arrival of the ground crews. The two other squadrons, 333rd and 410th, of the 94th Group are training with the 306th Bomb Group at Thurleigh. Today, the four 94th squadrons will take off from their separate fields and join up for a raid to the ship-building yards at Flensburg. Maj Ralph H. Saltsman, CO of the 331st Squadron, will lead the 94th formation, with the Group CO, Col John G. Moore, flying as his copilot.

The 91st ground crews have been doing double duty in servicing the 94th planes. Because of the busy schedule of putting up two missions, the air crews at Bassingbourn were awakened at 0245 hours and were at briefing at 0330. Both groups were briefed to depart at 0815 hours. All too typically, an inordinate amount of ground haze necessitates postponement of the mission. Take-off time is reset for 0900 hours and then delayed another hour. For awhile the crews think, as in similar situations, the missions will be scrubbed. Despite the lingering haze, no further delay or cancellation orders arrive at the hardstands. At 1000 hours coarse, wheezing coughs reverberate from dispersal points around the base as Wright Cyclone engines come to life. Puffs of blue smoke spurt rearward of the engines. The low-winged air craft begin rolling away from their hardstands, turning onto the taxiways to snake their way to the end of the runway in readiness for take-off. The Lead aircraft pauses, its Hamilton Standard props

forming shining iridescent pinwheels in the mid morning mist.

Two green flares streak upward from the balcony of the control tower. The first bomber, No. 970, "Connecticut Yankee", of the Lead 324th Squadron, surges forward as the brakes are released and begins lumbering down the long No. 25 runway. At her controls is Cpt Edward D. Gaitley, Jr., with Maj Haley W. Aycock, who is leading the Group today, sitting the copilot's seat. "Connecticut Yankee" struggles free of the runway at 1015 hours, followed at 30 second intervals by the other planes of the Group. Twenty-two 91st Group planes depart the airfield as the mission gets underway. Other planes in the 324th Squadron flying today include, No. 480, "The Bad Penny", flown by 1Lt Clyde E. DeBaun; No. 053, "Desperate Journey", 1Lt James M. Smith; No. 857, 1Lt John H. Miller; No. 487, "Ritzzy Blitz", 1Lt Charles W. Freschauf; No. 031, "Nitemare", 1Lt John S. Jackson; and, of course, No. 485, "Memphis Belle", with Lt Anderson.

The 322nd is sending up No. 483, "Spirit of Alcohol", 1Lt Edwin L. Baxley; No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal", 1Lt John T. Hardin; No. 724, "Thunderbird", 1Lt William D. Beasley; No. 057, "Piccadilly Commando", 2Lt Paul D. Kahl; No. 712, "Heavyweight Annihilators No. 2", 1Lt Don C. Bader; No. 139, "Chief Sly II", Cpt Bruce D. Barton, with Col William M. Gross, the Strike Force commander, aboard.

From the 323rd Squadron are No. 787, "Billie K", Cpt George P. Birdsong, Jr; No. 524, "The Eagles Wrath", Cpt Charles R. Giaque; No. 639, "The Careful Virgin", Cpt William E. Clancy; No. 399, "Man-O-War", 2Lt Charles A. Bennett; No. 559, "Stupntakit", 1Lt Charles H. Silvernail; No. 475, "Stric-Nine", 1Lt Norman Retchin.

The 401st puts up only three aircraft, No. 132, "Royal Flush!", 1Lt Marcell E. Fountain; No. 816, "Eager Beaver", 1Lt William H. Wheeler; No. 437, "Frank's Nightmare", 1Lt Donald H. Frank.

The 94th puts up 12 aircraft from Bassingbourn. Two abort back to base while forming up because of mechanical problems. Ten leave to join planes of the other two Squadrons leaving from Thurleigh. A total of twenty-four 94th bombers will form up with 11 aircraft from the 95th Bomb Group and 19 from the 96th Group to form the 4th BW for the attack on Flensburg.

By the time the 91st forms up, the haze has cleared. Cloud cover is less than 4/10. The Group has little trouble in making its rendezvous with the other Groups in the 1st Bomb Wing. For today's mission, the 101st Provisional Combat Wing (PBCW) is comprised of the 91st and 306th Groups, along with a composite Group formed by one Squadron each from the newly deployed 351st Group and the 92nd and 303rd Groups. The 102nd PBCW, with the 305th

Group in front, leads the Strike Force. The 101st PBCW follows, with the 91st Group in the Lead.

As the Group forms up over England, "The Bad Penny", lives up to her reputation of being a "jinx ship" in respect to having unusually frequent "technical problems." The fuel pump to the No. 3 engine goes out while she is at 2,000 feet. "The Bad Penny" immediately returns to base. This leaves twenty aircraft, with 201 men aboard, to accompany "Memphis Belle" and her ten crewmen on her last mission over the continent.

The Strike Force is not hindered by weather as it proceeds across the North Sea, over the Frisian Islands, and onto the enemy coast. By the time the Strike Force reaches the German border, the clouds have dispersed and do not exceed 4/10 cover. Much of the ground haze has also disappeared. The navigators easily pick out check points along the briefed route. The intercom on "Heavy Weight Annihilators No. 2" in the 322nd Squadron goes out completely at 1255 hours, just as she approaches the German coast at 20,000 feet. Lt Bader has no choice but to leave the formation and head back to Bassingbourn. Since they had penetrated the German fighter defense zone, the aircraft and crew are credited with a combat sortie.

Just after crossing over the continent, "Egar Beaver" loses a supercharger. Lt Wheeler has to drop her down "on the deck" and return to Bassingbourn. On their way back they drop their bombs, with good hits, on an airfield in Holland. The command antennae on No. 437, "Franks Nightmare", breaks off as the aircraft starts over the continent. Unable to receive signals from the Group Leader, Lt Frank has no choice but to leave the formation and return home alone.

German anti-aircraft batteries open up on the 91st formation as it crosses the coast. This is followed by attacks from 50-75 enemy fighters. Several twin-engine German aircraft first attempt to bomb the formation from about 27,000 feet. Each plane drops three heavy bombs that exploded among the fortresses. None of the bombers is hit. Ju 88s then arrive on the scene. The enemy aircraft remain out of range of the .50 caliber guns of the B-17s as they fire cannon shells into the formation. Finally about 35-40 single-engine fighters, Me 109s and FW 190s, make runs on the bombers from head-on, breaking and coming around and attacking from the rear. As the Group turns on the IP to start the bomb run, four more Ju 88s drop bombs on the formation, again with no effect. A Ju 88 flying alongside and at the same altitude as the 91st formation directs flak fire from the IP, a lake 2 Mi NW of Sehestedt, to beyond the target.

Flak over the target is moderate to intense and very accurate. Flak ships anchored in the Kiel harbor add to the fire coming from batteries located

around the target area. Additional problems are caused by our own forces. Some of the bombers in the 303rd High Group in the 102nd PBCW, flying ahead of and above the 91st, are loaded with 100 pound clusters of incendiary bombs. Many of these clusters break open as soon as they leave the planes. The 91st finds its flight path filled by falling incendiaries. It is only by skillful evasive action that none of the bombers is hit by incendiaries. Unfortunately, the evasive actions cause the 91st to miss its aiming point. The Lead bombardier, 1Lt John W. Joslin, Jr., has to do the best he can. He releases his bombs at 1330 hours and from 24,700 feet. They fall in the general vicinity of Kiel. None of the bombs fall on the target. The 91st is not alone in missing the target. Few of the other Groups hit their aiming points. Presence of a rather heavy smoke screen, which covered the target area 20 minutes before the first bomber arrived, contributes to ineffectiveness of the bombing. Additional smoke caused by bombs dropped by preceding Groups further obscures the target.

Fighter attacks resume after the target, continuing all along the route home. Once more twin engine aircraft bomb the Strike Force after it leaves the enemy coast. The Germans do not break off their attacks until the bomber formation is well out over the North Sea. This is one of the most prolonged and vicious attacks the 91st has endured to date. Enemy aircraft attack some part of the Strike Force for an hour and ten minutes.

One plane is lost on the mission, No. 483, "Spirit of Alcohol", of the 322nd Squadron. This is the fourth mission in a row Lt Baxley's crew has flown in the aircraft. Also aboard today is a British war correspondent, Ernest G. Lewis, reporting on the American air war. As the crews were loading this morning, Lewis first went aboard No. 724, "Thunderbird", looking for the ship on which he was scheduled to fly. The radio operator, T/Sgt Robert S. Lammers, invited him to go with them. Lewis declined and left to find his assigned plane, No. 483, "Spirit of Alcohol."

An engine of "Spirit of Alcohol" acted up during the flight to Kiel and she struggled to stay in formation. As the formation approached the target, the aircraft took flak hits causing damage to the plane and wounding the navigator, 1Lt James H. Fulmer, in the right hand. At about the same time, the tail gunner, S/Sgt Harrell H. Thompson, called over the intercom that German fighters were coming in on the tail and that his guns had jammed. At 1320 hours Me 109s sliced through the formation, hitting the No. 3 engine. With loss of the engine, "Spirit of Alcohol" fell out of the formation, aligning itself with a lower Group.

"Spirit of Alcohol" continued on to the IP with this Group and dropped her bombs. Shortly

thereafter, more Me 109s came at the aircraft firing additional 20 mm cannon shells into the fuselage. The British correspondent was killed and the plane went out of control. Lt Baxley rang the bail-out bell, but the top turret gunner, T/Sgt Jarvis E. Hall, was the only crewman in the rear of the aircraft able to extricate himself safely from the falling plane. The body of the ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Eugene C. Trimble, was latter found washed ashore from the Kiel Fiord, indicating he may have gotten out before the plane plunged to the water. The body of the waist gunner, S/Sgt William A. Rathgerber, was never found.

Lt Baxley, Lt Fullmer and the copilot, 1Lt James E. Breeden, escaped the falling aircraft through the bomb bays. Lts Baxley and Breeden fell into the Kiel Fiord where they were picked up by a German harbor patrol boat a few minutes later. Lt Fullmer landed on land about half a mile north of Kiel, where he was captured immediately by civilians who turned him over to a German Infantry patrol. He sustained three broken ribs when he landed. The body of the togglier, T/Sgt Arthur L. Poston, Jr., was recovered from the Fiord. It is not clear if he bailed out and was killed or was unable to make it to the nose hatch before the plane went in.

"Spirit of Alcohol" crashed into the Kiel Fiord at 1334 hours, exploding upon hitting the water.

The rest of the 91st aircraft made it home to Bassingbourn. Nos. 787, "Billie K", and 399, "Man-O-War", incurred serious flak damage. The remainder sustained only minor damage. The 94th Group was more successful in its attack on Flensburg. Weather conditions were good to the target. The Strike Force encountered only meagre, inaccurate flak along the flight route and over the target. Approximately 25 German fighters came at formation in an unorganized attack. None of the 94th Group bombers was lost. However, one crewman, 2Lt Charles B. Scott, was killed by enemy fire.

Thus ends the combat career of "Memphis Belle". Maj Wyler and his photographers excitedly congratulate Lt Anderson and his crew on bringing her home safely. Her ground crew chief, M/Sgt Joseph Giambrone, and others gather around "Memphis Belle" celebrating the historic moment and successful completion of Maj Wyler's "mission."

Maj Wyler later films Cpt Morgan and his crew to obtain additional film depicting the crew arriving at the "Belle" prior to departure on a mission. On the 13th of June "Memphis Belle" takes off on her "26th mission", to the United States, with Cpt Morgan and his crew. They arrive at National Airport in Washington, D.C., on 16 June where they are feted by members of Congress, the military and other dignitaries. Then, it is on to Memphis,

Tennessee for a three-day "home town" welcoming. Of course, she had never before been in her namesake town.

For the next three months "Memphis Belle" and her crew tour the country in support of the war effort and to stimulate sales of war bonds. Afterwards, the crew splits and the men go their separate ways. Cpt Morgan goes on to lead the first B-29 attack on Tokyo. "Memphis Belle" serves as a training aircraft in the States for the remainder of the war. On 2 July 1945 she is flown to Altus, Oklahoma to await being scrapped. On the 8th of March 1946, within weeks of being sold to be broken up and melted down, the Air Force loans her to the city of Memphis for "historical and educational purposes" for a fee of \$350. She is flown to Memphis on the 17th of July. There she remains on public display to this day. In August 1977, the city of Memphis relinquishes claim to "Memphis Belle" so that she can be placed on loan by the Air Force to the "Memphis Belle" Memorial Association and put on public display.

But, what of the other 20 planes that flew with "Memphis Belle" to Keil on 19 May 1943? All remained at Bassingbourn to continue the air war. Seventeen eventually were shot down or crashed while on a mission. Two were so badly battle-damaged, they were placed in salvage. The remaining aircraft simply wore out and was transferred to the Aphrodite program and exploded into bits and pieces in an unsuccessful attack on V-1, "Buzz Bomb", launch sites.

What follows is the history of these planes and their crews as they went about the deadly business of bombing targets on the continent.

324th Squadron

No. 031, "Nitemare"

Following the 19 May mission, "Nitemare" was not sent out again until 10 July. There is nothing in the records to indicate why she did not fly in the interim. Sgt Roger H. McDermott, who flew as her ball turret gunner on the 19th remembered no damage to the aircraft that would require her to be down for so long. Neither did the debriefing report record any damage. Beginning the 10th, "Nitemare" flew four successive missions, 10th, 14th, 17th, and 24th of July, during which she incurred only minor damage.

Her next mission, on the 26th of July, was a different story. For this mission to Hamburg, 1Lt James W. Rendall Jr.'s crew was aboard. "Nitemare" was flying in the No. 2 position of the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. All went well until the Strike Force approached the target. As "Nitemare" went over the Elbe River, the tail gunner, S/Sgt Charles F. Murray, noticed German Me 109 fighters coming up at them. He warned the

crew over the intercom as the fighters started into the formation. None hit "Nitemare" on this pass. As the Group approached the target, flak became intense and the German fighters broke away.

Flak tore into "Nitemare", setting both the No. 1 and 4 engines afire and creating havoc within the plane. With the loss of power from the two outboard engines, "Nitemare" began falling behind the formation. Lt Rendall had the bombardier, 2Lt Robert G. Cadilek, jettison the bombs to reduce the weight. They then were able to catch up with the Squadron by the time it went over the target. Again "Nitemare" was hit by flak. This time she no longer could stay in position and fell away from the protection of the other bombers. Once out of the flak barrage, German fighters, three and four abreast, came in on "Nitemare", causing more damage to the aircraft. Lt Rendall ordered the crew to put on their chutes. While still at altitude, 26,000 feet, those crewmen who were able to do so, began bailing out. The right waist gunner, S/Sgt David V. Ramsey, disconnected his oxygen mask and headed for the waist door. He was on the verge of passing out from the lack of oxygen by the time he went out the door. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt Bryon L. Brunty, followed him out.

Sgt Murray, who had not heard Lt Rendall's bail-out order, saw chutes popping open behind the aircraft. He looked forward into the fuselage from his tail position and saw no one. Assuming it was time to go, he put on his chest chute and bailed out the tail hatch. When the chute popped open, two lugs pulled out of the harness, leaving Sgt Murray to descend supported by only the upper straps. He landed in a wooded area near Rotenberg and was captured immediately by German soldiers. When all who could do so had bailed out, Lt Rendall went down into the nose and dropped through the hatch.

Others in the plane were not so fortunate. The radio operator, T/Sgt John E. Monahan, either had been killed by fighter machine gun fire or so badly wounded he could not leave his position. The Germans found his badly burned body in the radio compartment. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Robert L. Oyler, was able to exit the aircraft, but his chute failed to open. He fell to his death from 26,000 feet. Both the navigator, 2Lt George M. Guy, and Lt Cadilek bailed out through the nose hatch and landed safely. However, they were seriously wounded by approaching ground troops while trying to escape. Both died soon afterwards in German hospitals, Lt Cadilek on the 4th of August of inflammation of the peritoneum and sepsis. Lt Guy died on the 12th of August from a wound infection and loss of blood. The remainder of the crew became prisoners of war.

"Nitemare" crashed near Nindorf, 10 miles southeast of Rotenburg, Germany.

No. 487, "Ritzy Blitz"

"Ritzy Blitz" was up on the 21st of May for a mission to Wilhelmshaven. 1Lt John S. Jackson and his crew were with her as she flew Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron. Heavy cloud cover was expected over the Channel. Under these conditions, the Group would have to fly a rather loose formation. Meteorology predicted, however, the cloud cover would open up at the IP permitting a good run into the target. The Group Lead, LTC William B. Reid, was briefed to make a slow 360 circle before the IP if the formation was too loose. This would allow the Group formation to tighten up before starting the bomb run.

The Group assembled and began the climb to altitude from 13,000 feet to 22,000 feet while moving over the North Sea. Weather was as predicted and the Group formation was not tight. About 5 miles from the German coast roughly 50 Me 109s came out to meet the Strike Force. These attacks caused no major damage to the 91st bombers. Just before the IP, about six minutes from the target, 200-250 German fighters, mainly FW 190s, but including a few Me 109s, charged into the bomber stream. Most attacks were by fighters coming through the formation in waves of 4-8 aircraft at a time.

The first wave of fighters went for the Lead ship of the 91st Group, No. 990, "Dame Satan" with Cpt William E. Clancy as first pilot and LTC Reid, the Group Leader, his copilot. There were two navigators aboard, Cpt Ralph W. Hausman, Group navigator, and 1Lt Harry Ackerman, Cpt Clancy's regular navigator.

Approximately 50 enemy fighters came at the Group as it approached the coast. "Dame Satan" was not hit on this initial pass by the fighters. However, just before she turned on the IP to start the bomb run, "Dame Satan" was jumped by three FW 190s that came in on her from 1200 O'clock level. One shell exploded in the left side of the nose compartment, painfully wounding Lt Ackerman in the right eye, right arm and right leg. He lost sight in the right eye temporarily, but continued to man one of the nose guns, firing at incoming enemy aircraft. Another 20 mm shell exploded right in Cpt Hausman's face, inflicting dozens of wounds to his face, head and body. He was knocked unconscious by the force of the explosion. The bombardier, 1Lt Jack C. Fisher, suffered only minor head injuries from the exploding shells.

"Dame Satan" sustained considerable damage to the fuselage and wings during the fighter attacks. A 20 mm cannon shell went into the No. 4 engine, setting it on fire. The No. 1 engine also was hit, causing a reduction in power. Because of the confusion of the fighter attack and damage to the aircraft, LTC Reid did not

make a 360 turn to allow the loose formation to tighten up, as he had been briefed to do. Rather, he turned on the IP and went straight in to the target. Because of the loss of power, Cpt Clancy yelled out over the intercom for Lt Fisher to salvo the bombs so they could stay in formation. This he did and "Dame Satan" continued to lead the Group on into the target.

A few minutes later, Cpt Hausman regained consciousness and, seeing the German fighters continuing their attack on "Dame Satan", seized his machine gun and began firing. By the time the German fighters had been driven off, Cpt Hausman had lost so much blood from the exertion of manning the nose gun, he once more slipped into unconsciousness. He later revived and with Lt Ackerman's assistance navigated "Dame Satan" and the Group safely back to Bassingbourn.

Just as "Ritzy Blitz" turned on the IP, a single FW 190 came directly at her, head-on level, firing 20 mm cannon shells into the bomber. The bombardier, 2Lt Robert H. Davis, Jr., grabbed the nose machine gun and began firing into the attacking fighter at about 300 yards. He fired off 100 rounds as the enemy aircraft closed to within 50 yards, then dropped down and under "Ritzy Blitz", burning fiercely as it went by. The FW 190 went into a spin, headed straight down and was lost from sight.

The copilot, 2Lt David F. Gladhart, was seriously wounded in the left upper forearm by fragments of a 20 mm cannon shell that exploded in the cockpit. Lt Gladhart would not fly again until 16 July. Lt Jackson was also hit in the right eye. He would be back in the air on the 29th of May. The No. 2 engine was knocked out and the bomb bay doors shot up by the attacking FW 190. Although there was intense anti-aircraft fire over the target, German fighters continued blasting through the bomber formation, totally disregarding their own flak. Enemy aircraft continued the running attack for 32 minutes after bombs away. "Ritzy Blitz" received no additional damage on the return trip. Lt Jackson landed her at Bassingbourn without incident.

Eight days later "Ritzy Blitz" was repaired and back in the air. Her ground crew had done its job. This time she was flown by 1Lt Clayton L. Anderson's crew. The mission was routine for "Ritzy Blitz" with only minor flak damage. There followed more than 30 missions through the rest of 1943, during which "Ritzy Blitz" incurred either minor damage or none at all. All this came to an abrupt end on 11 January 1944.

For her 48th combat mission, to the Focke-Wulf 190 fighter assembly plant at Oschersleben, Germany, 2Lt Wayne D. Hedglin and his crew flew "Ritzy Blitz". This was Lt Hedglin's sixth mission. The rest of the crew had flown only one or two prior

missions. The 91st Bomb Group was Lead Group of the 1st Combat Wing. "Ritzy Blitz" was assigned the No. 3 position in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. Soon after crossing over the German coast and approaching Hanover, the Strike Force was attacked by upwards of 400 German fighters, including FW 190s, Me 109s and twin engine Me 110s. This was the most concentrated attack on a Strike Force by the Germans since the 17 August 1943 Schweinfurt mission. "Ritzy Blitz" had been a designated Spare on that mission, but was not needed.

German fighters charged through the formation, with up to eight planes abreast, firing 20 mm cannon shells into the bombers. "Ritzy Blitz" alone was attack by nearly 20 fighters. She took a direct hit in the No. 1 engine knocking it out and setting the engine on fire. Other shells exploded within the fuselage and the radio room compartment. The radio operator, Sgt James Lascu, Jr., was killed instantly. Control cables and instruments were shot away by the cannon fire, causing "Ritzy Blitz" to spin out of formation as Lt Hedglin and the copilot, 2Lt Donald W. Jones, struggled to regain control of the plummeting aircraft. Lt Hedglin rang the bail-out bell and ordered the crew to leave the plane.

The tail gunner, Sgt Stanley E. Lyttle, called over the intercom that he was hit and needed help. Because of the centrifical force of the downward twirling aircraft and the jumbled wreckage within the fuselage no one could get to him. The top turret gunner, Sgt Cody L. Wolf, although not wounded, was thrown down into the bomb bay by the wildly rotating aircraft as he attempted to move to the front nose hatch. The force of the spiraling plane pinned him among the bombs and shackles of the bomb bay. He was unable to extricate himself, remaining trapped in the falling aircraft.

The right waist gunner, Sgt Walter F. Williams, Jr., struggled to the rear waist door, pulled the release pin and kicked open the door. As a result of the spinning of the plane, instead of flying away in the slip stream, the door was flung back against the fuselage. It hit Sgt Williams in the leg, knocking him to the floor and pinning his leg outside the door. Force of the terrifying gyrations of the plane held him flat on the floor with the waist door holding his leg tightly to the outside of the aircraft. The left waist gunner, Sgt William O. Francisco, tried to remove the door from Sgt Williams' leg, but could not overcome the centrifical force. In the meantime the ball turret gunner, Sgt George M. Richardson, had come up out of his turret and was standing by watching. Sgt Williams hollered for Sgt Richardson to jump, but he did not. Apparently Sgt Richardson was afraid he would interfere with Sgt Williams' efforts to free himself, if

he tried to step over him in getting to the door. All of a sudden the plane leveled off and the door flew off Sgt Williams' leg. He rolled out the escape hatch, followed by Sgt Francisco. Almost at once, "Ritzy Blitz" again began twisting downwards even more crazily, trapping Sgts Richardson, Wold and Lyttle in the falling aircraft. Sgts Williams and Francisco were the only two crewmen of the six in the rear of the aircraft to survive to become POWs.

Lts Hedglin and Jones, the navigator, 2Lt Carey E. Goodwyn, Jr. and the bombardier, 2Lt John W. McKewen, bailed out through the nose hatch. Lt McKewen did not survive. Either his chute did not open or he was killed on the ground by angry civilians. German records indicate his body was found in the wreckage, perhaps a cover-up, because he did bail out. The survivors were rounded up quickly by German military and taken into custody to begin almost 16 months of captivity.

"Ritzy Blitz" fell to earth and exploded about 12 miles southwest of Hanover, scattering wreckage and her five unexploded bombs over a half mile radius.

No. 053, "Desperate Journey"

The next mission for No. 053 was what her name implied, a "Desperate Journey." 1Lt Norbert D. Koll and crew were aboard for the mission to Wilhelmshaven on the 21st of May. Lt Koll was a copilot who had flown seven previous missions with five different pilots. This was his first mission as command pilot. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Robert J. Abt, and right waist gunner, S/Sgt Guy F. Wyatt, had flown 10 and 7 prior missions, respectively, mostly with 1Lt Charles W. Freschauf. Except for the radio operator, T/Sgt Alfredo L. Davila, who was on his first mission, the rest of the crew had flown two to four missions with different crews. The 91st Group was short on navigators on the 21st. 2Lt Joseph H. Ferry, of the 94th Bomb Group also flying from Basingbourn, was assigned to Lt Koll at the last minute. Lt Ferry's regular 94th Group plane had been shot up badly on the mission to Flensburg the 19th and his crew was stood down, pending repair of their aircraft. Lt Ferry, anticipating no combat flying for a few days, had been to a "Wings for Victory" dance and returned to his quarters just in time to be called out at 0230 hours for breakfast and briefing. This was the first time he had met any of Lt Koll's crew.

Lt Koll was flying Lead of the Second Element in the Low Squadron for this mission. As described earlier, the Group Lead, LTC William B. Reid, was briefed to make a 360 degree turn before the IP if the formation was too loose. However, even though the formation was not tight, the Group turned on the IP and began the bomb run. It was at this point the German fighters came in on the 91st

formation in earnest. "Desperate Journey" was immediately forced out of the formation by the German fighters, as a steer being cut from the herd by experienced horsemen. The fighters swarmed in for the kill on the now even more straggling "Desperate Journey", like a bunch of sharks slashing at a lone swimmer. The bombardier, 2Lt Edwin H. Bruton, came on the intercom, trying to calm down the crew, with "Take it easy guys we are not going any place."

As the FW 190s came at "Desperate Journey" from dead ahead and the left side, Lt Ferry grabbed the side nose gun and fired off a burst. The gun jammed immediately, leaving Lt Ferry a spectator to what was transpiring. He was standing with his right hand on the gun breech. A few seconds later a 20 mm cannon shell slammed into the nose, hitting the gun and the back of Lt Ferry's right wrist. When he looked down his hand was hanging by the thumb bone. The same shell burst caught Lt Bruton in the stomach, just above the appendix. Lt Bruton tried to call Lt Koll on the intercom to tell him of their condition, but the intercom was out.

The two officers quickly evaluated their situation. Lt Bruton asked Lt Ferry to get the morphine syrette out of the first aid kit. As Lt Ferry bent down to open the kit, another 20 mm exploded in the nose hitting Lt Ferry in the upper thigh. By this time it was obvious that "Desperate Journey" was on her final journey. Neither of the nose crewman could move to the tunnel to see what was happening in the rest of the ship. They decided it best to get out while the getting was good.

Lt Ferry snapped on his chest chute with his good left hand, but then realized that because his right hand was gone, he could not reach the D-ring of the rip cord. Between the two of them, Lts Ferry and Bruton decided the best chance for Lt Ferry to bail out was to loop the oxygen mask hose through his D-ring, with Lt Bruton holding the hose to jerk open the chute as Lt Ferry fell away from the plane. Lt Bruton was to follow immediately. Lt Ferry managed to open the nose hatch and Lt Bruton pushed him out. Lt Ferry's chute opened as planned, but Lt Bruton did not appear from the falling plane. After the war, upon Lt Ferry's recommendation, Lt Bruton was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, posthumously, for saving Lt Ferry's life.

The radio compartment had taken a direct 20 mm cannon shell hit and was set afire. The bomb bay was also ablaze, and the bombs were still aboard. The only other crewman to escape from the falling aircraft was the ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Robert J. Abt. Wounded, Sgt Abt was forced to leave the flaming aircraft. Sgt Abt made his way to the waist door and bailed out. Apparently the rest

of the crew were either dead or seriously wounded. None left the falling bomber.

Although he reached the ground safely, Sgt Abt was shot in the leg by a civilian. Both crewmen were captured in short order and taken to the naval hospital at Sanderbusch, near Wilhelmshaven. There they received excellent medical care.

There is nothing in the German records as to how the other eight crewmen were killed. Neither was the crash site of "Desperate Journey" identified.

No. 970, "Connecticut Yankee"

"Connecticut Yankee" flew again on the 21st to Wilhelmshaven with no damage, followed by ten more missions from which she came home unscathed or with only minor flak hits. Although fighters came up at the formation on most of these missions, "Connecticut Yankee" was not struck by machine gun or cannon fire. On the 11th of June mission to Bremen, when she flew Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron, two Me 109s flew past on the right side of "Connecticut Yankee", about 600 yards out. As they passed the aircraft, the fighter in the rear broke off and came toward the bomber from 0400 O'clock. Sgt Robert S. Blair, who was manning the right waist gun, fired about 80 rounds into the fighter which then dived down steeply, giving off a large burst of smoke. The fighter did not fire at "Connecticut Yankee."

On the 25th of June, while returning from a mission to Hamburg, the electric glove of the left waist gunner, T/Sgt J. R. Carlson, shorted out, burning his hand. In trying to get his hand out of the glove, Sgt Carlson accidentally fired his machine gun, shooting up the left stabilizer. "Connecticut Yankee" returned to base safely.

"Connecticut Yankee" ran out of luck on the 6th of September mission to Stuttgart, her 38th trip over the continent. 2Lt William G. Pegram and his crew were flying their second mission in "Connecticut Yankee", as No. 3 of the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. The aircraft took flak damage over the target, knocking out an inboard engine. Gas consumption was high in the remaining engines, causing two to run dry while over the Channel. "Connecticut Yankee" made landfall on one good engine, but was losing altitude. The final engine cut out as its tank emptied. Since there was still enough altitude to do so, Lt Pegram ordered the crew to bail out.

The chute of the navigator, 2Lt Robert S. Cosgrove, would not open when he pulled the rip cord. He had to tear off the canvas cover as he fell through the air to get the canopy released. The chute of the left waist gunner, Sgt Frederick E. Hutchinson, opened inside the fuselage as he jumped, leaving him dangling outside the plane. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Hans W. Wobst,

gathered up the chute and pushed it out, saving Sgt Hutchinson's life. The rest of the crew, except for Lt Pegram, bailed out safely. Lt Pegram put "Connecticut Yankee" down in a wheels-up dead-stick belly landing in a swamp near Winchelsea. Although the muddy swamp acted as grease, allowing a smooth landing, she was badly damaged structurally. Because of the combined damage from flak and the rough landing, "Connecticut Yankee" was declared salvage and did not fly again.

No. 857

No. 857 was back in the air on the 21st. For this mission, 1Lt John H. Miller was again first pilot. Except for the left waist gunner, S/Sgt Curtiss B. Pope, who was flying in place of S/Sgt Edward F. Simon, this was the same crew who had flown her on the 19th. Sgt Simon flew this mission with 1Lt Leonard L. Cox in No. 527, "Great Speckled Bird." Sgt Simon will be killed on 22 June while flying with 1Lt Joseph E. Slattery, Jr. in No. 998 on a mission to Huls. Six of the crewmen aboard today are from Lt Miller's original crew who arrived at Bassingbourn on 3 April. Two others, S/Sgts Robert J. Abt and Guy F. Wyatt, are flying with 1Lt Norbert D. Koll, in No. 053, "Desperate Journey." Sgt Abt will be one of only two crewmen to survive when "Desperate Journey" goes down on this mission. Sgt Wyatt will be killed. The other original crewman, T/Sgt David F. Fishburn, will also be killed when Lt Slattery and No. 998 go down on the 22nd of June.

No. 857 flew in the No. 2 position of the Second Element of the Low Squadron, on the right wing of No. 053, "Desperate Journey." No. 816, "Eager Beaver" was the No. 3 plane in the Second Element. As described earlier, the 91st formation was loose as the Group turned on the IP and started the bomb run. As she approached the target, Me 109s and FW 190s made head-on attacks on No. 857. The No. 1 and 2 engines were set on fire. With the loss of power from two engines and the resulting fire engulfing the left wing, the crew began bailing out. The flight engineer, T/Sgt William D. Spofford, went to the front of the bomb bay. The copilot, 2Lt Roscoe V. Black, Jr., handed him his chest pack chute which Sgt Spofford kept behind the pilots' seats. When Sgt Spofford bailed out, Lt Black was still standing at the front of the bomb bay. The radio operator, T/Sgt Oscar L. Stuart, was standing on the catwalk at the aft end of the bomb bay. Neither got out of the plane.

Apparently the gas tanks caught on fire and melted off the left wing. No. 857 flipped upside down, trapping most of the rest of the crew in the aircraft. She exploded at 15,000 feet. Of the other crewmen, only the bombardier, 2Lt David F. Snow, the ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Francis R. Trahan, and

the tail gunner, S/Sgt Newell R. Lane, escaped the floundering bomber. All survivors became POWs.

No. 857 crashed on the mainland near Wilhelmshaven.

322nd Squadron

No. 724, "Thunderbird"

"Thunderbird" was back in the air again on the 21st to Wilhelmshaven. 1Lt William D. Beasley and his crew were once again flying the aircraft, this time in the No. 2 position in the Second Element of the High Squadron. The mission proved to be a wild one for Lt Beasley's crew and for "Thunderbird". As the Group passed the IP and began the bomb run, German fighters streaked in on the bombers with the intent of breaking up the loose formation. They were successful. Seven or eight attacks were made during the bomb run, which, when combined with an intense and very accurate flak barrage over the target, succeeded in scattering the formation. This caused the bombs to be dropped over a wide area, most of which missed the target.

"Thunderbird", in particular, came under heavy fighter attack, beginning at 1243 hours, one minute before bombs away. The first fighter, a FW 190, came in from 1100 O'clock level. The navigator, 1Lt Robert H. Bowcock, engaged the fighter with the left nose gun 800 yards out and continued firing until it broke away only 50 feet from the nose of "Thunderbird." The prop of the FW was slowly wind-milling as the aircraft fell over on its back out of control and went down under the bomber in a flat spin, smoke pouring from its engine.

Two minutes later two Me 109s charged "Thunderbird", one from 1100 O'clock level, the trailing fighter from 1000 O'clock level. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt Clyde R. Burdick, locked on the first attacking aircraft as it came out from under the left wing of the bomber. He put 15-20 rounds into the fighter, which broke away at 0600 O'clock, went out of control and blew up about 1,500 feet below the tail of "Thunderbird." The bombardier, 1Lt Olan L. Hubbard, fired from the left nose gun at the second Me 109 from about 1,000 yards out until it broke away at 0700 O'clock when within 50 yards of the bomber. He saw tracers going into the engine, which started burning, enveloping the cockpit with flames. The fighter fell away in a flat spin.

Thirty seconds later, yet another fighter, this time a FW 190, came at "Thunderbird" from 1100 O'clock level. Sgt Burdick fired on the fighter as it came in under the wing of the bomber. About 20 rounds went into the enemy aircraft. It broke down and out at 0700 O'clock and exploded about 2,500 feet below "Thunderbird." At the same time another FW 190 was about 400 yards out lining up to make a run on the following Group. Sgt Burdick

swung his gun onto this fighter and fired off 150 rounds. The aircraft continued on to about 0830 O'clock and 500 yards out where it burst into flames, went into a glide and exploded about 1,000 feet below the bomber.

Another 30 seconds later a FW 190 approached "Thunderbird" from 0500 O'clock high. As it passed on the right side of and 600 yards from the bomber, the right waist gunner, S/Sgt Roberto Gonzales, put 50 rounds into it. The enemy aircraft went down trailing flames and heavy smoke, exploding when 1,000 yards beyond the bomber. After this concentrated action there was a two and a half minute respite before the next fighter, a Me 109, attacked "Thunderbird", once again from 1100 O'clock level. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt John L. Barrett, picked him up at 800 yards and squeezed off 100 rounds before the enemy aircraft broke down and away at 400 yards, heading out at 0600 O'clock. The fighter went on down below the bomber. The pilot bailed out as plane caught on fire. There was another quiet period of five minutes before the final fighter attack, a single FW 190 that came in at 0630 O'clock level. The radio operator, T/Sgt Robert S. Lammers, engaged the enemy aircraft at 800 yards, firing 150 rounds as it approached to within 300 yards. The cowling came off the engine of the fighter and it stopped firing at 400 yards. The enemy aircraft went right over "Thunderbird", flared up on its nose, stalled out at 0800 O'clock high and exploded.

Even though all these enemy aircraft were firing their 20 mm cannons as they came in on the bomber, not a single hit was made on "Thunderbird." An extremely intense eleven minutes of action for the crew of "Thunderbird." The crew was credited with six destroyed aircraft, three by Sgt Burdick, one probable and one damaged. Flak had done a much better "job" on "Thunderbird." The fuselage at the left waist gun position looked like a sieve there were so many holes in the skin. The rest of the trip home was routine.

Because of the flak damage, "Thunderbird" was not able to mount another mission until the 11th of June when she started out for Bremen with 1Lt Milton A. Green's crew aboard. The weather over the target was poor. The Strike Force dropped on some air fields and a military installation. This was a much less hectic mission than her previous one. Still, from seventeen until nine minutes before the target the aircraft took flak hits that shot up the Plexiglas in the nose and knocked holes in the left wing and No. 1 engine cowling. The bombardier, 2Lt Herbert F. Egender, had glass fragments blown into his eye by the shattering nose glass.

Nine minutes before the target a single Me 109 came in at "Thunderbird" from 0100 O'clock

high. Lt Egender opened fire as the enemy aircraft got to within 500 yards of the bomber. He saw tracers hitting the fighter in the nose and cockpit before it broke off and started spinning downward. Flames and large pieces of metal streamed from the falling fighter, which exploded before hitting the water. "Thunderbird" dropped on the target and returned to base without further incident.

On her next, and final, mission, the 28th of June, 1Lt Edward T. Brodnax, Jr. was her pilot. Lt Broadnax had been copilot on 1Lt James D. Baird's crew. For the past two missions he had been flying as a first pilot with make-up crews. On the 28th he flew No. 3 in the Second Element of the High Squadron, on the left wing of Cpt Donald E. Sheeler in No. 139, "Chief Sly II."

"Thunderbird" took a flak hit in the No. 4 engine just before bombs away. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt John J. Smith, was wounded by several flak shards as they went over the target. The aircraft was spewing out smoke and dropping back of the formation at a rapid rate as she lost altitude. After the Group had dropped on the target, the formation made a slow right turn and descended to 7,000 feet as it went out over the Bay of Biscay. "Thunderbird" was even lower. When about five miles from the coast, two fighters made a run at the struggling bomber as she disappeared into the low haze. "Thunderbird" was last seen at 1647 hours 20 miles west to Isle de Quessant, with the No. 4 engine feathered and the crew unloading guns and ammunition to lighten the aircraft.

Lt Brodnax ditched the bomber in the Channel. Several of the crewmen scrambled into rubber dinghies before the plane sank. They were not picked up before darkness set in. During the cold windy night a combination of chilling and fatigue resulted in crewmen losing consciousness and falling into the choppy waters. By dawn only the left waist gunner, S/Sgt Virgil R. Anderson, and Sgt Smith remained alive. They were picked up by French fishermen and taken ashore and turned over to the Germans.

No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal"

The next mission for "Wheel 'N Deal" was the 29th of May when 1Lt William D. Beasley's crew took her to the submarine pens at St. Nazaire, France. They flew in the No. 2 position of the Lead Element of the Lead Squadron. In addition to the regular crew, Cpt William H. Clothier, one of the Hollywood photographers working with Maj Wyler, flew along to get some final combat film for the "Memphis Belle" documentary.

Although St. Nazaire was one of the most heavily defended targets on the continent, "Wheel 'N Deal" suffered no battle damage on the 29th. Five German fighters came at the formation, but did not

make a run on "Wheel 'N Deal." Unfortunately, one of the two 2,000 pound bombs she was carrying hung up and did not drop on the target. After they were out of the flak and free from fighter danger, the flight engineer, S/Sgt Clyde R. Burdick, went down to the bomb bay and unsuccessfully tried to loosen the bomb shackle with a screwdriver. The bombardier, 2Lt William O. Deal, came back to attempt to release the hung-up bomb, also unsuccessfully. After the formation was over the Channel and had dropped to a lower altitude, Sgt Burdick went back to the bomb bay again and discovered the ordinance men had loaded the bomb with the sear in the wrong direction. He reached in with a screwdriver and tripped the release, allowing the bomb to drop free into the Channel below.

When Lt Deal earlier had tried to salvo the bombs, the bomb bay door retracting screws did not fully extend. The doors had to be extended by hand so the latch between the screws and door fittings would engage enabling the electric motors to retract the doors. Sgt Burdick asked the right waist gunner, S/Sgt Roberto Gonzalez, to bring him the crank and extension handle from the radio room so he could crank down the extending screws. When Sgt Gonzalez handed the crank to Sgt Burdick, the crank fell off the handle and dropped through the open bomb bays into the Channel. Lt Beasley had to land the aircraft with the bomb bay doors down. He did so with no damage to the aircraft.

"Wheel 'N Deal" was not put back into the air until 24 July. She received no serious damage on that and the ensuing four missions. The fifth mission on 17 August, to the ball bearing plants at Schweinfurt, more than made up for the prior safe ones. 1Lt Leroy B. Everett, Jr. and his crew were aboard, flying in the No. 2 position of the Lead Element of the High Squadron for this historic mission. German fighters began swarming in on the Schweinfurt Strike Force almost as soon as it crossed over onto the continent. Me 109s and FW 190s came at the formation in groups of 15-20, flying wing-tip to wing-tip. 2Lt Don S. von der Heyde's crew in No. 225, "V-Packette", was the first to go down, only 20 minutes into Belgium.

Most of the attacks were frontal. Both the bombardier, 2Lt Capen R. Simons, and the navigator, 2Lt William H. Turcotte, were manning nose guns and firing at incoming fighters. All other gunners on "Wheel 'N Deal" were firing at enemy aircraft. The floor of the nose soon was littered with a deep layer of hot spent machine gun shell casings. A small fragment of 20 mm cannon shell hit Lt Turcotte on the wrist but did not break the skin. One Me 109 passed so close to the nose of the bomber as it darted over the left wing tip, Lt Turcotte could see clearly the pilot's face and the white neck scarf he was wearing. When the

Squadron Lead aircraft, No. 453, "The Bearded Beauty-Mizpah", along with 2Lt Everett L. Kenner's crew went down, Lt Everett moved "Wheel 'N Deal" up into the Squadron Lead.

The fighter attacks let up as the bombers went through the flak barrage over the target, but picked up again as soon as they were out of the flak. Head-on attacks going out were just as ferocious as they had been on the way in. None of the crew expected to survive. Lt Everett figured they were not going to make it and lifted a wing in a deliberate attempt to ram one of the German fighters streaking by. He missed and "Wheel 'N Deal" did make it back to Bassingbourn. Still, "Wheel 'N Deal" was riddled with 20 mm cannon fire, one round of which wounded the right waist gunner, S/Sgt Leonard Waldron, in the knee.

"Wheel 'N Deal" was one of the lucky 91st Bomb Group ships on that mission. The Group had suffered the greatest percentage loss (55%) it would incur during the entire airwar. Ten of the twenty 91st planes that went over the continent were shot down. Another, No. 172, "My Prayer", was salvaged after crash-landing at a base away from Bassingbourn.

"Wheel 'N Deal" was repaired and ready to fly again on the 24th of August. The entire Group was called back from this mission because of cloud cover over the continent. Nothing unusual happened to "Wheel 'N Deal" on the following seven missions. The mission on 9 October to the fighter aircraft assembly plant at Anklam was another wild ride for the crew of "Wheel 'N Deal." 1Lt Robert S. Gerald and his crew had been flying her since the 3rd of September. On the 9th of October he had aboard a new navigator, 1Lt Thomas J. Cannon, radio operator, S/Sgt Paul E. Baker, and copilot, 2Lt Charles L. Early. These were all on their first combat missions. For this mission Lt Gerald was flying Lead of the Second Element of the Lead Squadron. 1Lt Charles B. Pinning, in No. 711, "Chief Sly III", was on his right wing and 2Lt James, "Don", Judy and his crew in No. 178, "The Old Standby", in the No. 3 position. 1Lt Leroy E. Everett, Jr. in No. 804, "Hell's Halo", with Cpt Donald E. Sheeler flying as his copilot and Squadron Leader, led the Lead Squadron, and thus the Group. At 1002 hours, one hour and forty-five minutes before the target, the intercom went out on No. 794, the No. 2 plane in the Lead Element. 1Lt William R. Cox had to abort the mission.

The Strike Force was attacked by swarms of enemy fighters as soon as it crossed the Danish coast. Among the attackers were twin engine Me 110s, firing rockets into the formation from the rear. Two rockets went over the right wing of "Wheel 'N Deal", exploding just ahead of the aircraft. The explosions gave the crew, including Lt Gerald, quite

a scare. "Chief Sly III" was hit by 20 mm cannon fire and had to drop out of the formation. Lt Pinning headed for Sweden, but went down in the Baltic. All ten crewmen were lost. Up ahead in the Lead Element, the left wing plane, No. 778, "Green Fury", with 2Lt Alexander W. Stewart's crew, was knocked out of the formation by a head-on attack from a FW 190 just before the IP. Four of the ten crewmen survived to become POWs. Lt Judy moved "The Old Standby" up into the space vacated by "Green Fury."

As she went over the target, "Wheel 'N Deal" took several flak hits, one of which wounded Sgt Baker, in the forehead. Except for flak holes in the fuselage at the left waist gun position and in the left horizontal stabilizer, along with a few small ones in the wings, "Wheel 'N Deal" was relatively undamaged. She dropped on the target at 1144 hours. As the formation came off the target and cleared the flak, the fighters swarmed in again. Between 200 and 300 enemy aircraft of all types hit the returning Strike Force. Lt Judy's ship, "The Old Standby", was hit by several fighters and went down.

Me 110s continued firing rockets into the formation while Me 109s and FW 190s came through the formation in groups of 8-12 aircraft. Lt Gerald could see 20 mm shells from the frontal attacking fighters bursting in a line as they headed for him and could swerve "Wheel 'N Deal" slightly to avoid the exploding cannon fire. Cannon fire streaming in from behind he could not see. Lt Gerald relied on the tail gunner, S/Sgt David A. Stone, to yell over the intercom when to dodge. Some were bursting so close it seemed the bomber would be blown out of the sky. B-17s all around them were afire and going down. Lt Gerald said several prayers as fought the controls, often having to use his knee to help move the columns when his arms became tired.

Fifty-two minutes after the target, a twin-engine Me 110 came in at "Wheel 'N Deal" from 0730 O'clock slightly above level. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt Buford C. Swango, engaged him at about 400 yards. Tracers started going into the engines of the enemy aircraft at 250-300 yards out. Sgt Swango continued firing into the fighter as it came to within 150 yards of the bomber where it rolled upside down and burst into flames. One of the crewmen bailed out, his chute opening. The Me 110 spun down and blew up. The rest of the trip home was uneventful. In spite of almost three hours of continuous attacks by enemy fighters to and from the target, "Wheel 'N Deal" was hit by 20 mm cannon fire only in the rudder. She made it back to Bassingbourn relatively unscathed, except for some tired, sweaty and very grateful crewmen.

This had been another bad day for the 91st Bomb Group. Five of the fifteen bombers that made

it over the continent were shot down. Once they were on the ground, Maj Sheeler, rushed up to Lt Gerald and grabbed him around the neck and said "Pappy (his nick name for Lt Gerald), I thought you were gone." He assumed he had lost his entire squadron. Maj Sheeler asked Lt Gerald why he did not move up onto his left wing when Lt Judy went down. Lt Gerald replied "I wasn't about to come up on your wing, everybody who came up there was shot down."

"Wheel 'N Deal" was soon to run out of luck. She aborted her next two missions, 14 October and 26 November. On the former mission, both inboard superchargers lagged excessively and the No. 2 induction system was cracked. All were repaired that night. Still, "Wheel 'N Deal" was not put back in the air until the 26th of November. On this mission the oxygen system went out and several of the crew, including the ball turret gunner, Sgt Morris Schendleman, who passed out, suffered from lack of oxygen before the pilot, 2Lt John T. Wennerberg, could drop down below 10,000 feet. The mission of 1 December, to a secondary target, Solingen, Germany (the primary target, Leverkusen was clouded over) was not an abort. For this mission, most of Lt Wennerberg's crew were with him. 2Lt Robert A. Dickson was flying as copilot, filling for 2Lt William F. Myers, and S/Sgt Nick J. Nicoletti was radio operator in place of S/Sgt Charles W. Grubb, Jr. Sgt Nicoletti was on his second combat mission.

"Wheel 'N Deal" was designated as a "Spare" for the mission and was supposed to be the first in sequence to fill in for a plane having to abort from the Group formation. As the Group started coming together over the base, No. 767 aborted. 2Lt Leonard F. Anderson for some reason or other moved No. 794, also a Spare, into the vacated slot before Lt Wennerberg could slide over. Twelve minutes later, No. 187, "Buckeye Boomerang", with 1Lt John D. Davis' crew aboard, aborted from the No. 3 position of the Second Element of the High Squadron. Lt Wennerberg pulled "Wheel 'N Deal" into that position and flew on with the Group.

The American fighter escort had to turn back before the target leaving a 20-minute window of no coverage before the next escort group arrived. After the American fighters left, German fighters started harassing the formation. "Wheel 'N Deal" took a 20 mm shell in the No. 3 engine on the first pass by the enemy aircraft. A second attack shot up the batteries, putting the two turrets out of commission. The gunners could not rotate to track the fighters charging by. They could only fire when the fighters intersected the field of fire of their stationary guns. Only the waist and tail gunners could follow the enemy aircraft maneuvering around the bomber. The fighter escort finally

arrived and two P-47s pulled up alongside "Wheel 'N Deal" to protect her from further enemy attacks.

No. 794, which had moved into the slot "Wheel 'N Deal", should have filled, was hit by fighters half way between Koblenz and Cologne on the way to the target. Part of a wing came off and she went down. Lt Anderson and the other nine crewmen were all killed.

Just as the formation turned on the IP and began the bomb run, "Wheel 'N Deal" was hit by flak, knocking out more of the electrical system and setting the fuel tank for the No. 2 engine afire. The top turret gunner, Sgt Squire Baker, was reloading his .50 caliber machine guns when the flak hit. He had just lifted the cover plate with his right hand when a shard of flak slammed into the gun causing it to move back crushing his left hand and arm. An 88 mm shell went up through the bomber just behind the left side pilot's seat and on out the left side of the top turret. It did not explode.

The tail gunner, Sgt William E. Roller, apparently was hit by one of the early fighter passes and was struggling in his attempt to bail out. When a German fighter came in from the rear and went under the bomber, Sgt Baker had called to Sgt Roller to watch for him to come back up at them. There was no answer from the tail position.

Because of the flak damage, "Wheel 'N Deal" dropped out of the formation and down to about 13,000 feet. The bombardier, 2Lt John W. Temple, tried to jettison the bomb load to lighten the plane. With the outage of the electrical system the bomb bay doors only partly opened. The first bomb crashed into the doors, jamming them in place. Lt Temple went back to the bomb bay and Sgt Baker, smashed hand and all, came down from his turret to help. Sgt Baker disconnected his oxygen hose and climbed down in the bays and kicked open the doors. The two crewmen then pulled the auxiliary bomb release behind the pilot's position and released the bombs. More German fighters came in on the bomber. This time the No. 2 engine was knocked out and the No. 4 engine set on fire. There was a hole in the right wing so large you "could drop a horse through it." "Wheel 'N Deal" was doomed.

Lt Wennerberg kept telling the crew over the intercom "You better get out." Lt Temple and the navigator, 2Lt Eugene C. Cohalan, went out through the nose hatch. The ball turret gunner, Sgt Morris Schendleman, came up out of the turret when he heard the bail-out bell. He helped the radio operator, Sgt Nicoletti, out of his flak suit. Sgt Schendleman went back to the waist to get his chute and signaled the waist gunners to leave. He then went back past the radio room and dropped out the bomb bay. Sgts Baker and Nicoletti dropped

through the bomb bays, as did the Lts Wennerberg and Dickson.

Sgt Baker's chute would not open so he had to pull it out by hand until the wind caught the pilot chute and pulled out the main canopy. Except for Sgt Roller, the rest of the rear crew bailed out through the side door. The two waist gunners saw Sgt Roller start crawling towards the tail escape hatch and try to drop out. As Sgt Cole went out the door, he saw Sgt Roller's head and feet hanging out of the tail hatch with the rest of his body wedged in the plane. Either he was caught in the hatch or was dead. His body was found in the wreckage. The rest of the crew landed safely to begin their ordeals as POWs.

"Wheel 'N Deal" went down in the Rhine River between Dusseldorf and Duisburg, Germany.

No. 057, "Piccadilly Commando"/"Blonde Bomber"

No. 057 was called "Piccadilly Commando" when flown by 2Lt Paul D. Kahl's crew with "Memphis Belle" on 19 May, a name she retained while flying seven more missions through 17 July. During the first six she incurred no major damage.

On 21 May, "Piccadilly Commando" was loaned to the 323rd Squadron to be flown by 1Lt Charles H. Silvernail's crew. She incurred only slight flak damage and had a 20 mm cannon shell hole behind the navigator's compartment. Back with the 322nd, "Piccadilly Commando" was flown to Bremen on the 11th of June by 1Lt John T. Hardin, but dropped on an alternate target. One of the two bombs she carried hung up when the bombardier, 2Lt William O. Deal, toggled. Three minutes after the target a FW 190 went past "Piccadilly Commando" at 0200 O'clock to attack a straggler B-17 below. S/Sgt Leroy C. Sheehan, right waist gunner, opened up when the enemy aircraft was 600 yards out. He fired 75 rounds into the fighter as it passed in front of "Piccadilly Commando." The fighter went about 1,500 yards below the bomber where the left wing came off and the aircraft crashed into the sea. On the trip home, Lt Deal was able to jettison the hung-up bomb in the North Sea.

1Lt James D. Baird took "Piccadilly Commando" out on the next two missions, 22nd and 28th of June. However, he had to abort on the 28th when a waist gun and the top turret guns gave out. F/O Winston M. Cavaneau's crew took "Piccadilly Commando" on missions on the 4th and 10th of July. On the 10th, the No. 2 propeller ran away early into the mission, forcing Lt Cavaneau to return to base before the rest of the Strike Force was recalled because of dense cloud cover over the target.

On the 17th of July, with 2Lt Jack A. Hargis's crew on board for a mission to Hanover, she

sustained 20 mm cannon fire damage and was stood down for repairs until the 28th of July. During this interval her name was changed to "Blonde Bomber." Following the mission on the 28th of July, "Blonde Bomber" flew six more missions with only minor damage. On the 23rd of September the 91st went to Nantes. 1Lt Robert E. Wine and his crew flew "Blonde Bomber." They flew the No. 3 position of the Second Element of the High Squadron, on the left wing of 1Lt Robert S. Gerald, in No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal." A few fighters came up at the formation and moderate, but accurate, flak was encountered over the target. The left waist gunner, T/Sgt Ovila S. Corbiere, got excited during one of the fighter passes and fired into the left stabilizer of "Blonde Bomber." The aircraft also was hit hard by flak over the target, damaging the left side of the nose, next to the navigator's position. "Blonde Bomber" made it back to England, but because of the battle damage and increasing problems in maintaining control of the aircraft, Lt Wine decided it best to land at St. Mawgan. "Blonde Bomber" was not put back in flying condition until 14 October.

The mission on 14 October was back to the ball bearing factories at Schwienfurt. Because of the late arrival of the 305th Group at the 40th Combat Wing rendezvous point, leaving only two groups in the Wing, there was confusion regarding which Bomb Wing, and Group, would lead the Strike Force. The briefed Lead 92nd Group, of the 40th Combat Wing, passed the Lead over to the 1st Combat Wing, which was led by the 91st Group. Thus, for the second time, the 91st led the Strike Force to Schweinfurt. This was another very rough mission for VIII Bomber Command, with 60 bombers lost.

Planes from the 91st Group began taking off at 1045 hours. 1Lt William R. Cox and his crew were in "Blonde Bomber" flying the No. 3 position of the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. Of the fourteen planes put up by the 91st this day, eight made it to Schweinfurt, the others aborting back to base. Only four remained in formation as they went over the target. Two of the three 322nd bombers turned back early, No. 794 with 1Lt James L. Griffin's crew and No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal", 1Lt Robert S. Gerald. Lt Griffin headed back at 1205 hours when the fuel transfer from the bomb bay tank failed. The superchargers on engines No. 2 and 3 of "Wheel 'N Deal" lagged and all the guns froze up. Lt Gerald left the formation at 1230 hours to return to Bassingbourn.

No. 714, from the 323rd Squadron, with 2Lt Robert M. Slane's crew aboard was lost to enemy fire. No. 714 was hit hard by flak over the target, knocking out an engine. The tail gunner, Sgt Claud J. Smith, was hit in the chest and killed at his position by a 20 mm cannon shell. Lt Shane kept the

aircraft in the air for another 45 minutes until they were jumped by 12 German fighters. Two more engines were shot out. With loss of three engines, No. 714 could not stay airborne. Lt Shane and the copilot, 2Lt Joseph A. Johnson, made an emergency landing south of Metz. The navigator, 2Lt Arthur G. Foster, evaded capture, escaping to Switzerland, and eventually returning to England. The rest of the crew became POWs.

Although "Blonde Bomber" made it over the target, it was a rough ride for her and the crew. Almost every type of fighter in the Luftwaffe harassed the Strike Force from the time it entered the continent until the bombers were back over the Channel. Although bombers from other Groups were going down all over the sky, "Blonde Bomber" was spared serious attacks on the way in to the target. "Blonde Bomber" was the only aircraft from the Low Squadron to go over the target. She formed on the left wing of No. 484, "The Bad Egg", of the 401st Squadron for the bomb run.

Flak became intense and accurate as the Group turned on the IP. Flak bursts jammed the bomb controls of "Blonde Bomber", causing two of her bombs to hang up. The rest dropped on the target. As "Blonde Bomber" left the target, fighters were at her again. She took a hit in the No. 2 engine fuel tank, which started leaking gas badly and caught on fire. Then, 20 mm shells took out the intercom system and hit the left waist gunner, S/Sgt William H. Evans, in the right leg, shattering the bones below the knee. In spite of the seriousness of his wounds, Sgt Evans stood on his good left leg and remained at his position, continuing to fire his machine gun at attacking enemy aircraft.

The flight engineer, T/Sgt Lester B. Schlaich, had Lt Cox feather the No. 2 engine. He then began transferring gas out of the No. 2 tank. As this was being done, Sgt Schlaich went down from his top turret position to the nose and asked the bombardier, 1Lt James E. Harlow, to try to jettison the two hung up bombs. He got back to the bomb bays just in time to see the two bombs plus the extra fuel tank being carried in the bomb bays drop away! By this time the No. 2 tank had been emptied of gas and the fire was out.

"Blonde Bomber" dropped out of formation because of the loss of power from the No. 2 engine. The German fighters noticed the No. 2 engine was feathered and knew "Blonde Bomber" was a cripple and came at her with vengeance. She was attracting a lot of attention from German fighters, who concentrated on lone aircraft. Lt Cox twisted "Blonde Bomber" through all sorts of corkscrewing maneuvers to throw off the aim of the fighters. The enemy aircraft stayed with him. Lt Cox unfeathered the No. 2 engine, letting the prop windmill so the fighters would think it was pulling power. This

relieved a little of the pressure from the attacking fighters, who had plenty of other stragglers to go after.

In the midst of all this action, the oxygen supply to the right waist gunner, S/Sgt Paul DeMidio, failed and he passed out. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Ernest J. Koger, came up out of his turret to man Sgt DeMidio's waist gun. The electrical suit of the tail gunner, William B. McCrae, shorted out and his right hand and right foot became frostbitten. When he saw the fire from the No. 2 tank and felt the gyrations of the aircraft, Sgt McCrae thought "Blonde Bomber" was going down. He opened the tail hatch and was ready to bail out, but decided to stay with her awhile longer, finally realizing the aircraft was still air worthy.

Fifteen minutes after the target a Me 109 came directly at "Blonde Bomber" from 1200 O'clock level. Lt Harlow, opened fire with a nose gun when the enemy aircraft was about 500 yards away. He put 100-150 rounds into the approaching fighter, tracers going into the fuselage and wings. As the fighter went down under the bomber, the crew saw the engine smoking and part of the left wing fall away. Thirty-five minutes later a FW 190 came in on "Blonde Bomber" from 0500 O'clock low, sailing up and over the bomber and heading away at 0630 O'clock. Sgt Schalich engaged the fighter with his top turret twin .50 caliber machine guns as it approached to about 500 yards. After he had fired 50 rounds, the fleeing aircraft exploded in a ball of fire.

Lt Cox eventually brought "Blonde Bomber" back to Bassingborn, battered and low on gas, but surviving to fly another day. For their efforts in bringing the aircraft back safely, Lt Cox and Sgt Schailch were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Sgt Evans was awarded the Silver Star for remaining at his position, even though severely wounded. This was Sgt Evans' first and final mission.

Because of the extensive battle damage sustained on the 14th of October, "Blonde Bomber" was not back on flight status until the 5th of November. Starting the 5th she flew six missions through the 7th of January, receiving very minor damage. Her next mission, on the 11th of January, was the last "Blonde Bomber" would fly. For this mission, to the Focke-Wulf assembly plane at Oschersleben, 2Lt Wayne E. Murdock was flying as first pilot. "Blonde Bomber" was in the No. 3 position of the Second Element of the Lead Squadron.

The bomber stream was hit by fighters almost as soon as it crossed over onto the continent. Fighters, Me 109s and FW 190s, bore in on "Blonde Bomber" from 1200 O'clock high, pumping 20 mm shells into her as they came. Some of the enemy

aircraft came so close the nose crew of the bomber could see the determined expressions on the faces of the pilots as they flashed by. The bombardier, 2Lt Robert R. Case, and the navigator, 2Lt George F. Young, Jr., fired the nose guns at the incoming fighters. The fighters were closing on the bomber so fast, it was difficult to track them with machine gun fire. Lts Case and Young tried to spray out a square pattern of machine gun fire where they thought the fighters would come in. "Blonde Bomber" took a number of 20 mm cannon fire hits, one of which exploded in the radio room, setting it afire and killing the radio operator, Sgt Teddy J. Morris. Lt Case was hit over much of his body by flying pieces of aluminum and flak as well as shards of Plexiglas that were driven into his face. One piece of metal grazed his left arm at the level of his heart. Lt Case was more mad than scared and continued firing despite the pain from the wounds. Soon the floor of the nose compartment was deep in spent shell casings

Most of the controls also were shot away by the cannon fire screaming into all parts of the plane. Lt Murdock struggled to maintain position in the formation to the target as the plane became a fiery inferno. The waist gunners, Sgts Walter T. Romanofski and Russell B. Hoover, and the ball turret gunner, Sgt Thomas H. Rogers, figured the plane was going to explode any second and bailed out through the waist hatch. During one of the early attacks, a 20 mm shell blew away part the left foot of the tail gunner, Sgt Julius R. Sobieski. Sgt Sobieski bound his bleeding foot and stayed at his position. The rest of the crew also remained aboard to the target.

After bombs away, Lt Murdock could no longer hold "Blonde Bomber" in position. Engulfed in flames, she immediately fell out of the formation. Knowing the plane was doomed for certain, the rest of the crew began bailing out. Lts Case and Young went out the nose hatch, Lt Case checking out the flight deck to make certain the pilots were OK before leaving. The copilot, 2Lt Kenneth L. Manson, and the top turret gunner, Sgt Arlo L. Rosewell, dropped through the bomb bay. Sgt Sobieski finally bailed out through the rear hatch. As they fell away from the aircraft, both Sgts Sobieski and Rosenwall saw Lt Murdock leave the plane, but did not see his chute deploy. His body was found near the fragmented remains of "Blonde Bomber." Either his chute was shot up and failed to deploy, or Lt Murdock was hit and killed on the catwalk over the bomb bay, his body then falling free.

As Lt Case floated downward, a Me 109 came at him. The plane circled Lt Case's chute, the pilot dipped his wing toward the chute, smiled and waved at Lt Case before zipping away. All eight of the surviving crewmen became long-term "guests"

of the German Luftwaffe as POWs. Lt Case and Sgt Sobieski received excellent medical care from the Germans.

"Blonde Bomber" went to the ground in the vicinity of Oschersleben, Germany.

No. 139, "Chief Sly II"

Cpt Bruce D. Barton and "Chief Sly II" were back in the air again to Wilhelmshaven on the 21st, completing the mission with only minor flak damage and one encounter with a FW 190. The enemy aircraft came at the bomber from 0700 O'clock level thirteen minutes after the target. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt Richard L. Hare, fired a short burst into the fighter, which peeled off to the right trailing smoke from the engine.

No further damage was incurred on missions on 29 May and 11 and 13 June. On the 28th of June the 91st went to the submarine pens at St. Nazaire. Cpt Donald E. Sheeler flew "Chief Sly II" as Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron for this mission. The bombardier, 2Lt Herbert F. Egender, was a member of 1Lt James E. Breeden's crew. Lt Breeden had been shot down on the mission to Kiel on the 19th of May, while flying his first mission as copilot with 1Lt Edwin L. Baxley, in No. 483, "Spirit of Alcohol." Two days later, the navigator of Lt Breeden's crew, 2Lt Morris L. Floyd, also went down on his first mission, to Wilhelmshaven, while flying with 1Lt Norman Retchin's crew in No. 657. Since then the rest of Lt Breeden's crew had been flying missions together with several different pilots. On the 28th of June, Lt Egender was flying with Cpt Sheeler. Five of his crew were flying on the left wing of "Chief Sly II", with 1Lt Edward T. Brodnax in No. 724, "Thunderbird."

As "Chief Sly II" went over the target a shard of flak blasted a large hole in the left inboard wing resulting in loss of power in both the No. 1 and 2 engines. Many of the electrical instruments were knocked out, as was part of the copilot's window. Cpt Sheeler kept "Chief Sly II" in the air across the Channel, but landed at an alternate airbase at Pontneath, in southern England, rather than risk going on to Basingbourn. "Thunderbird" with five of Lt Egender's original crewmen aboard went down in Channel. Eight of the ten crewmen, including four of Lt Egender's crew mates were killed. The other two crewmen became POWs.

"Chief Sly II" was finally repaired. She was back flying again for a mission to the marshalling yards at Flushing, Holland on 15 August, this time with 2Lt William R. Cox and his crew. The next day 1Lt Joel W. Gatewood's crew flew her to the LeBourget Airfield near Paris. She came through both missions unscathed. The following mission for "Chief Sly II", to Schwienfurt on the 17th was her

last. Lt Gatewood and his crew were aboard once again, leading the Second Element of the High Squadron. This was Lt Gatewood's fifth mission, his third as first pilot. Three men aboard were new to his crew. The waist gunners, right, Sgt George F. Hite and left, S/Sgt Thomas A. Parfitt, were replacements for waist gunner, S/Sgt Joseph J. Kominak, who had suffered frost bite on a mission to Gelsenkirchen on the 12th and for tail gunner, S/Sgt Floydstone F. Bryant, who had died from anoxia when his oxygen system went out on the 12th. Lt Gatewood's regular waist gunner, S/Sgt Frederick F. Pearce moved into the tail gun position for this mission. T/Sgt Daniel J. Butler replaced the radio operator, T/Sgt Jack H. Schaeffer, who also had suffered frost bite on the 12th.

Wave upon wave of German fighters came at the Strike Force from the time the bombers entered over the continent. FW 190s and Me 109s were coming at the Squadron Lead planes in flights of 15-20 aircraft. About ten miles from Aachen, "Chief Sly II" was hit hard by head-on attacking fighters. The electrical system to the left wing flaps was knocked out making it hard to control the plane. It took all of Lt Gatewood's strength to hold the plane level. Lt Gatewood struggled for about ten minutes to hold up the wings and keep the plane in level flight. He finally hollered at the copilot, George E. Riegel, to set the autopilot to give him more control of the bomber. At that instant a 20 mm cannon shell from a Me 109 slammed into the cockpit killing Lt Riegel. The flight engineer, T/Sgt Raymond F. Canada, who was standing behind the pilots assisting them in controlling the aircraft, slumped down dead from the exploding cannon shell. The rest of the controls were shot away by the same round, causing the bomber to go into a downward spin. With no purpose to remaining at the useless controls, Lt Gatewood made his way down to the nose where the navigator, 2Lt Daniel A. Downey, and bombardier, 2Lt Harold H. Hammond, were standing up in the compartment. Lt Gatewood opened the hatch and said "Let's go!" Lt Hammond bailed out, followed by Lts Gatewood and Downey.

In the back, Sgt Parfitt squeezed out the waist window, but found himself plastered to the side of the fuselage by the force of the spin. He thought he "was a goner", but the aircraft lurched and he came free. Sgt Parfitt opened his chute and landed safely. None of the other crewmen was able to escape the spinning aircraft.

Lt Hammond pulled the rip cord of his chute almost as soon as he was out of the plane as he wanted to make certain it was open before he ran out of oxygen and passed out. As he floated down, a Me 109 approached Lt Hammond's chute. At first he thought the pilot was going to fire at him, but he

merely circled Lt Hammond a few times and took off. The plane came so close on one pass that Lt Hammond could see that the pilot was wearing a dress uniform.

Lts Downey and Gatewood free-fell for some time trying to get low enough to reduce the time anyone on the ground would have to shoot at them. "Chief Sly II" kept circling around them as she settled down, coming closer to them on each pass. As she came at them a third time, both crewmen opened their chutes so as to slow their rate of fall and let the bomber pass under them. "Chief Sly II" crashed below the airmen as they floated down. Lt Gatewood settled into a tree, in which his chute hung up, about 100 feet from where "Chief Sly II" had crashed and was burning. Ammo was going off so Lt Gatewood unsnapped his chute and clutched the back side of the tree to protect himself from the exploding shells. About that time a bomb went off, throwing Lt Gatewood out of the tree. Lt Downey, seeing him struggling to get up, came over and helped Lt Gatewood into the woods. Lt Hammond was captured immediately. The other three crewmen joined up and wandered free for 10 days before being captured by civilians to begin their 20 month stay as POWs.

No. 712, "Heavyweight Annihilators No. 2"/"My Prayer"

"Heavyweight Annihilators No. 2" was stood down from flying until the 11th of June, when 1Lt Don C. Bader flew her on the Bremen mission that diverted to Wilhelmshaven. She flew again on the 13th and 22nd of June, after which she was down until the 17th of July. She did not experience serious damage on any of these missions. There then followed five successive aborts for a variety of malfunctions. It was not until the 15th of August that No. 712 flew a successful mission, with 2Lt James D. Judy and his crew aboard. Sometime during this period, the name and nose art, a provocative reclining woman with yellowish brown-hair, attired in a skimpy dark blue silky negligee, was painted over and replaced by a scroll with an abbreviated derivation of the 23rd Psalm and, in script, the name, "My Prayer."

Lt Judy's second mission aboard "My Prayer" would be her last. On the 17 August mission to Schweinfurt, "My Prayer" started out in the No. 2 position of the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. Soon after crossing over onto the continent the formation was in shambles as wave upon wave of German fighters came at the bombers, their 20 mm cannons blazing away. Planes fell like flies, opening gaps in the formation. The remaining bombers kept moving forward in an attempt to close up the formation, only to be shot down themselves.

About 20 miles southwest of Frankfurt, "My Prayer" took a number of cannon hits that turned her into a raging inferno and wounded the top turret gunner, T/Sgt Earl M. Cherry. The aircraft appeared doomed. On Lt Judy's orders, the crew began bailing out, with the copilot, 2Lt Roger W. Layn, assisting them. All were out except the two pilots and Sgt Cherry, when Lt Layn saw that Sgt Cherry's chute was too badly burned for him to bail out. Lts Judy and Layn immediately decided to try to get the aircraft back to England rather than abandon Sgt Cherry. Lt Judy took "My Prayer" down "on the deck" as Lt Layn and Sgt Cherry fought the fires all the while fending off attacking German fighters. The fires were eventually brought under control and the enemy aircraft disappeared. Although few of the controls were functioning and fires kept starting up again, the skeleton crew brought "My Prayer" back across Germany, Belgium and the Channel, flying 100 feet above the ground and water. Lt Judy put her down safely on Manston Airbase. "My Prayer" had over 500 holes in her and was declared salvage. For a more complete description of the final mission of "My Prayer" see page 83.

323rd Squadron

No. 639, "The Careful Virgin"

The next mission for the "The Careful Virgin" was on the 29th of May. Cpt William E. Clancy's crew was aboard as she led the High Squadron to the submarine pens at St. Nazaire, France. This mission was a much less traumatic one than Cpt Clancy and his crew had experienced on the 21st when they flew in No. 990, "Dame Satan", to Wilhelmshaven. "The Careful Virgin" received no serious damage on the 29th. She flew nine more missions through the 16th of August, only a few of which resulted in even minor damage to the bomber.

All this changed on the next mission, to the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt on 17 August. For this mission, "The Careful Virgin" was loaned to the 401st Squadron. Recently promoted Cpt Harry T. Lay and his crew flew her as Lead of the Low Squadron, a Composite Squadron comprised of crews from the 322nd and 323rd Squadrons as well as the 401st. Cpt Lay had an experienced crew aboard. Cpt Lay and his crew had completed their 25 missions earlier, but had been asked to fly an additional five missions owing to a severe shortage of experienced crews. The war over Europe during this period was swallowing up planes and crews almost as soon as they went into the air. Cpt Lay and his crew agreed to continue flying while new crews were breaking in. All survived the additional bombing missions. Cpt Lay then trained as a P-51

fighter pilot and returned to combat. He was killed on his second fighter mission, on 17 July 1944, near Sompius, France.

When Cpt Lay's crew was being organized in Boise, Idaho in 1942, Sgt William A. Gottschalk, trained as a radio operator, was assigned to the crew. After he reported in, the crewmen that had arrived earlier told him "we already have a radio operator, T/Sgt Donald F. Robertson." But, there was no designated ball turret gunner. So, Sgts Gottschalk and Robertson tossed a coin. Sgt Robertson won. He remained as radio operator and Sgt Gottschalk became the ball turret gunner.

The Luftwaffe came at the Schwienfurt Strike Force in vengeance as soon as it crossed over onto the continent and continued their attacks all the way to the target and back out. Fighters swarmed in on the Low Squadron and planes began falling like "autumn leaves." Everywhere the crew looked they saw blazing bombers going down, some blowing up in mid air before hitting the ground, others disintegrating in large boiling black clouds as they impacted and exploded. Sgt Gottschalk saw one wounded B-17 make a complete loop as it started down. A few chutes came out. In spite of the intense action and hard charging German fighters sweeping through the squadron, there were only two small bullet holes into the left side of the fuselage of "The Careful Virgin."

Well before the target, the tail gunner, S/Sgt Clarence W. Clark, called Cpt Lay over the intercom and asked "Why are we flying down here all by ourselves?" From his vantage point in the rear of the plane, he saw that the rest of the Low Squadron was gone. 1Lt Robert E. Wine in No. 311, "Local Girl", had aborted over the Channel. No. 712, "My Prayer" had been hit so hard, Lt Judy had to turn back home. Lts Bennett (No. 559, "Stupentakit"), Accaro, (No. 524, "Eagles Wrath"), and Von Der Hyde, (No. 225, "V-Packette") had been shot down. Cpt Lay looked up and saw only two planes were left in the High Squadron. He jerked "The Careful Virgin" upward to move into Lead of the remnants of the High Squadron, No. 497, 2Lt Cleo C. Struble, and No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal", 1Lt Leroy B. Everett, Jr.

Cpt Lay and the surviving aircraft continued on, dropping on the target as they went over. On the way back, "The Careful Virgin" incurred no additional damage from the swarming enemy aircraft. After the intensity of the attacks had slackened off, Cpt Lay called for a check of the crew over the intercom. When Sgt Robertson did not answer, he asked the rear crew to check him out. Sgt Gottschalk got out of the ball turret and with the two waist gunners, S/Sgt Louie R. Rivera and Sgt Ole Loken, went to the radio compartment. The door was jammed shut. When the crewmen pushed

the door open, they found Sgt Robertson's body wedged against it. The two bullets that had gone into the fuselage had hit Sgt Robertson in the throat, killing him instantly. "The Careful Virgin" landed back at Bassingbourn at 1754 hours.

There followed three much less traumatic missions on 27 August and 6 and 15 September, and an abort on the 26th of September. On the next mission on the 8th of October, to Bremen, "The Careful Virgin" failed to live up to her name. She flew as Group Lead plane, with Cpt John T. Gladstone as first pilot and LTC Clemens K. Wurzbach, the Group Leader, in the copilot's seat. The Group navigator, Cpt Monroe W. Williams, along with the crew's regular navigator, 1Lt Robert N. Paulson, were in the nose. Lt Paulson was flying his 25th, and final, mission. The mission progressed routinely until the Group approached the target. The Lead bombardier, 1Lt Edward J. Reynolds, Jr., could not see the target, the submarine pens, because the entire area was covered by a combination of a heavy smoke screen and hazy weather conditions. So he headed the Lead aircraft, with the rest of the Group following, to where the smoke was most dense, assuming this would be the most critical area. Unfortunately, this took the formation over the very heavily defended center of Bremen itself. The flak barrage was intense. "The Careful Virgin" was hit in the No. 2 engine, knocking it out. Flak also smashed the accumulator between the cockpit and bomb bays, resulting in loss of all hydraulic fluid to the brakes and cowl flaps.

Once over the target, a Me 109 attacked "The Careful Virgin" from 0900 O'clock level. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt Boyd W. Veager, opened fire at 800 yards. When the enemy aircraft was about 400 yards out, Sgt Veager saw his tracers going into the engine. The fighter stalled out, burst into flames, nosed over and fell away out of control.

Cpt Gladstone, had no problem in flying "The Careful Virgin" back to Bassingbourn. Landing her was a different story. Since he had no brakes, Cpt Gladstone came in on the shorter north-south runway so as not to block the main runway should he crash. As soon as the aircraft slowed somewhat on landing, the pilots ground-looped the plane to lose speed. With the No. 2 engine out and the main power from the No. 3 and 4 engines on the right wing, they had to loop to the left. In so doing, the aircraft slammed into No. 591, "The Shamrock Special" which was being worked on by her ground crew. "The Careful Virgin" went into the tail of the "The Shamrock Special" causing extensive damage to both aircraft.

Lt Paulson heard a hissing sound when "The Careful Virgin" finally came to a stop. Fearing the worst, a fire and explosion, he dived for the nose escape hatch. Cpt Williams had the same fear and

idea and acted as did Lt Paulson. The two navigators hit the hatch at the same time, becoming stuck in the opening. Lt Paulson pulled away to let Cpt Williams drop out and then followed, both hitting the ground on the run. The rest of the crew lost no time in exiting "The Careful Virgin."

One of the ground crewmen for "The Shamrock Special", Sgt Jack Gaffney, had been working in the rear of the fuselage. Tired and in need of a smoke, he went out through the side hatch and had walked only a few feet from the plane when he saw "The Careful Virgin" coming at him and plowing into "The Shamrock Special", smashing the fuselage where he had just been working. Neither plane caught fire, but the rear section of "The Shamrock Special" had to be completely replaced. "The Careful Virgin" was in the repair shop for almost a month, but she was put back in flying condition.

"The Careful Virgin" was back in combat on the 3rd of November. No damage. She was then stood down for a little over three weeks, getting back in the air for a mission on the 26th with no damage, only to be stood down again until the 22nd of December. She was beginning to wear out. The battering from flying combat and the ground wreck had taken its toll on the various systems of "The Careful Virgin." Finally she was deemed airworthy again and was in the air routinely following the 22 December mission, flying seven missions through the 6th of February, receiving only minor damage on all except the 29th of January when she took several large flak hits.

A mission to Oschersleben, on the 20th of February proved to be the last time "The Careful Virgin" would carry a crew over "Fortress Europe." 2Lt Spencer K. Osterberg's crew was aboard for her final mission as she flew in the No. 3 position of the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. German fighters came at the formation just as it left the IP and engaged the bombers again as they broke off the target. Flak bursts over the target knocked several large holes in the fuselage and wings and hit the No. 4 engine propeller. Fighters came at "The Careful Virgin" head on, further damaging the No. 4 engine prop and hitting the left wing between the fuselage and the No. 2 engine with 20 mm cannon fire. In spite of considerable damage to the aircraft, Lt Osterberg brought her safely back to Bassingbourn for the last time.

This time the Group Maintenance Officer decided she had seen more than her share of combat flying. "The Careful Virgin" was one of the last B-17F models still flying combat in the 8th Air Force. After more than 50 combat missions and considerable battle damage, it was obvious that it would be counter-productive to attempt to send crews out in her again.

But, the war was not over for "The Careful Virgin." On the 18th of March she was transferred to 2nd Strategic Air Depot. There she was stripped down, had the cockpit cut away and an open windscreen put in place. Radio controls were installed. She was then assigned to the highly secret "Aphrodite" program. Aged bombers so modified were packed with 20,000 pounds of Torpex explosive and used as flying bombs. A crew of two would take the planes into the air and bail out after reaching altitude. A control plane would take over the "Aphrodite" and guide her on to crash the explosives onto the target.

On the 4th of August, "The Careful Virgin" was stuffed with explosives and flown to a V-1, "Buzz Bomb, launch site at Mimoyecques, France. Unfortunately, she crashed short of the designated target, harmlessly blowing herself to pieces. Thus, "The Careful Virgin" did to herself what no German flak battery or Luftwaffe fighter had been able to do in 13 months of flying combat over the continent.

No. 399, "Man-O-War"

"Man-O-War", on loan to the 324th Squadron, aborted on the 21st when the electric suits of three crewmen shorted out. She then successfully completed five missions through the 26th of July, sustaining only minor damage. On the 30th of July 2Lt Keene C. McCammon took her out on a mission to Kassel. This was his crew's third mission. They flew in the No. 2 position in the Second Element of the Low Squadron. The Strike Force was first hit by German fighters 15 minutes before reaching the enemy coast. "Man-O-War" escaped the wrath of the Luftwaffe and made to the target without incident. Her luck ran out on the bomb run. She took flak hits over the target that knocked out the No. 1 engine. Lt McCammon was able to keep "Man-O-War" at altitude and in position, even with reduced power, as far as the Wal River in Holland. There flak hit them again, taking out the No. 3 engine. The plane started falling out of formation.

Lt McCammon knew "Man-O-War" could not stay up much longer. He rang the bail-out bell and told the crew they had to get out. The crewmen started arguing with Lt McCammon over the intercom for him to try to keep the plane in the air and make it back on two engines. About this time two FW 190s hit "Man-O-War" with 20 mm cannon fire, knocking out the intercom and setting the bomb bay on fire. The crewmen were still arguing with Lt McCammon and calling out attacking enemy aircraft when the intercom went dead. Flames began raging upwards into the forward part of the plane. The controls also had been shot out. The aircraft no longer was responding to Lt McCammon. She was going down. Lt McCammon and the copilot, 2Lt John P. Bruce, realizing they had only a few

moments before the plane might explode, made their way through the fire down into the nose. The two pilots and the bombardier, 2Lt Daniel V. Ohman, bailed out through the nose hatch. Lts McCammon and Bruce landed safely in the suburbs of Boxley, Holland. Lt McCammon was captured immediately by German infantry men. Lt Bruce was taken into custody an hour later by German police who turned him over to the military. Lt Ohman fell to his death through the roof of a house. Either he delayed too long in opening his chute or it failed to open. The other seven crewmen remained trapped in the falling aircraft. None survived.

"Man-O-War" crashed to the ground near Opijnen, Holland.

No. 787, "Billie K"

"Billie K" was sent out again on the 21st of May with Cpt George B. Birdsong, Jr. and his crew. Although four fighters made a run on the bomber, none was hit by the gunners. Nor did "Billie K" sustain serious damage. On the 29th she was loaned to the 322nd Squadron for 1Lt Don C. Bader's crew to take her to St. Nazaire. While over the target a flak burst knocked a small hole in the cockpit window, but neither pilot was wounded. On the 11th of June she was back in the 323rd formation. 1Lt Jerold D. Kethley and his crew flew her in the No. 3 position of the Second Element of the High Squadron. Ten minutes before the alternate target, Wilhelmshaven, "Billie K" came under attack by enemy fighters. A Me 109 made a run at the bomber from 0800 O'clock high, crossing under her and heading out at 0300 O'clock low. The right waist gunner, S/Sgt Wilfred R. Bacon, opened fire as the fighter approached, putting about 180 rounds into the plane. The fighter burst into flames and spun out of control down to the ground.

Two minutes later a FW 190 attacked from 1200 O'clock low. S/Sgt Harold V. Stokes, in the ball turret, started firing when the fighter came to within 1,000 yards. It appeared that the pilot was hit. Tracers were seen going into the nose and fuselage. The fighter spun out and went down immediately, exploding upon hitting the ground. "Billie K" was not hit during either pass by the enemy aircraft. She and her crew returned to Bassingbourn with no further action.

Lt Kethley then took her up on eight successive missions through the 30th of July. They aborted on 25th of June and 17th of July. The 28th of June, on a mission to St. Nazaire, "Billie K" sustained a large flak hole in the right wing between the No. 3 and 4 engines, but returned safely. On the other five missions she was not damaged.

On 30 July Lt Kethley's crew was aboard for a mission to the aircraft plant at Kassel, Germany. "Billie K" led the Second Element of the Low

Squadron. Over the target the bombs did not release because of an electrical failure. The bombardier, 2Lt James J. Cullen, had to salvo the bombs causing them to drop late and miss the target. As the formation came off the target, the Group Lead aircraft, No. 639, "The Careful Virgin", made a violent, quick left turn. This threw the tail end of the formation, including the entire Low Squadron, out of position. The Lead aircraft kept making rapid left turns as the Group moved away from the target. As a result, "Billie K" ended up 1,000 yards below and slightly behind the rest of the formation. The out-of-position "Billie K" was jumped from the low rear by 12-14 FW 190s and Me 109s flying in an echeloned line. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Harold V. Stokes, began firing at the nearest plane, a Me 109, when it was about 800 yards out. The enemy aircraft slowed to a stall at 200 yards. The prop stopped turning and the fighter fell off to its left and went down. The rest of the fighters went on by without damaging "Billie K." Lt Kethley brought her on back to Bassingbourn without incident.

On the 12th of August luck ran out for Lt Kethley's crew and "Billie K." On this day they flew Lead of the Second Element of the Lead Squadron, Deputy Group Lead, on a mission to the synthetic oil plant at Gelsenkirchen. Soon after passing over the Dutch coast the formation was attacked by German fighters, both FW 190s and Me 109s. On the first pass "Billie K" was hit by 20 mm cannon fire, knocking out the No. 1 and 3 engines and showering the cockpit with glass from a shattered windshield. The No. 3 prop started windmilling and then the engine ran away. Lt Kethley felt a tap on his shoulder and looked around to see the top turret gunner, S/Sgt Robert C. Danielson, standing behind him with his face a mass of frozen blood, obviously seriously wounded about the head. "Billie K" was dropping out of formation as she lost speed. Lt Kethley told the copilot, 2Lt Ennis Cox, to take Sgt Danielson down to the nose hatch and get him out of the aircraft. Before Lt Cox could do so, more enemy fighters came through the formation, this time knocking out the No. 4 engine. The pilots tried to restart engines No. 1 and 3, but to no avail. With only one engine pulling power, "Billie K" started falling rapidly. Almost immediately thereafter yet another group of fighters came at the struggling bomber, knocking out her remaining engine. The B-17 was never intended to be a glider. Lt Cox took Sgt Danielson down to the nose and assisted him in bailing out. He put the D-ring of the chute in Sgt Danielson's hand told him to count to three before pulling the cord and pushed him out.

"Billie K" kept going down at a steep angle with German fighters still after her. Lt Kethley saw only forest below and knew he could not crash-land

the aircraft. He rang the bail-out bell and told the crew over the intercom to "get out." Lt Kethley stayed at the controls until he thought everyone had time to leave the plane. He was starting to get up to leave himself when the flight engineer, T/Sgt Alfred J. Bragg, who was manning a waist gun on this mission, touched him on the shoulder and asked "Did you say bail out?" Sgt Bragg had been disconnected from the intercom. Continuing to make ready to go to the nose hatch, Lt Kethley said "Boy, you better go, because I'm gone!" Sgt Bragg went back in the fuselage past the bomb bay and bailed out the waist door, along with the rest of the rear crew, except for the tail gunner, S/Sgt John E. Burke. Sgt Burke dropped through the tail hatch.

In the nose, the bombardier, 2Lt James J. Cullen, had his intercom connection broken by an exploding 20 mm shell. He turned around and saw the navigator, 2Lt Robert D. Sternberg, putting on his, Cullen's, chute. Lt Cullen plugged back into the intercom and asked Lt Kethley if they were bailing out. Lt Kethley told him "Yes man, we're going down. You'd better get out." Lt Cullen grabbed his chute from Lt Sternberg, snapped it on and dived through the nose hatch. His boot caught in the hatch leaving him dangling outside the plane by one foot. Lt Cullen's chest pack chute came loose and was hanging over his head. He thought it had fallen off and tried unsuccessfully to pull himself back into the plane. He then saw the chute was only over his head so slipped his foot out of the boot to fall free. He landed safely, but it was a month before he could walk on the foot that had been caught in the hatch. By the time Lt Cullen finally broke free of the aircraft, Lt Sternberg had put his own chute on and dropped out after him. Lt Kethley made his way to the nose and followed them through the hatch. All the crew landed safely.

Sgt Danielson was picked up by the Germans and taken to a hospital, where he remained for about a year. He was repatriated back to the States before the war was over. Sgt Danielson lost one eye and required over 50 operations to get all the metal out of his head, neck and shoulders. Years later a small washer from the turret still remained imbedded in his cheek.

"Billie K" crashed near Goch, Germany.

No. 559, "Stupntakit"

1Lt Charles H. Silvernail continued flying "Stupntakit" for eight more missions, through the 12th of August with no serious damage. On the 11th of June Lt Silvernail took her out on a mission that started out for Bremen, but switched to the alternate target, Wilhelmshaven, when Bremen was found to be clouded over. A FW 190 dropped a bomb from about 2,000 feet above "Stupntakit" while crossing

over the bomber from 0730 O'clock. The blast rocked the wings, but did no damage to the aircraft. The only damage on this mission was from shell casings spewing out of B-17s above them. The pilot's windshield and the nose glass were shattered and holes punched in the left horizontal stabilizer.

On the 4th of July, with Lt Silvernail's crew again aboard, a Me 109 came at the "Stupntakit" from 1200 O'clock high eight and one half minutes before the target, Le Mans, France. The enemy aircraft went right over "Stupntakit", but only the tail gunner, S/Sgt Richard Robinson, was able to lock onto the plane. He started firing when the fighter was 50 yards past his tail position and continued pumping shells into the fleeing fighter until it was more than 500 yards out. The plane fell downwards out of control, exploding when it hit the ground. Four minutes later a Me 109 that had just shot down a B-17 from the 533rd Squadron of the 381st Bomb Group, No. 928, flown by 1Lt Olef M. Ballinger's crew, came diving down through the 91st formation and under "Stupntakit". The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Emmitt R. Wilson, fired on him as he went under the bomber. The fighter pulled out of the dive, burst into flames and broke into three pieces.

On her next mission, the 25th of July, to Hamburg, "Stupntakit" was hit hard by flak over the target, knocking large holes in the left outer and right inner wing panels. Lt Silvernail once more brought her home safely. 2Lt Keene C. McCammon's crew started out with Stupntakit", as a Spare, on the 29th of July, but was not needed in the formation and returned to base. "Stupntakit" was attack by four German fighters on the 30th of July. On this mission to Kassel, Lt Silvernail was flying "Stupntakit" as Lead of the Low Squadron. Enemy aircraft started coming at the Strike Force when about 15 minutes inland from the coast. At 0958 hours a FW 190 made a run at "Stupntakit" from 0500 O'clock low on the first attack. From his ball turret position, Sgt Emmitt R. Wilson, began firing at the approaching aircraft at 1,100 yards. The fighter barreled in directly at "Stupntakit", as if intent on ramming the plane. When within 50 yards of the bomber, the fighter fell over on its right wing and went straight down in a spinning circle. Sgt Wilson lost sight of the falling fighter at about 10,000 feet. The fighter did not fire a shot as it charged the bomber.

At 1030 hours four FW 190s dived down in a "T" formation from 0800 O'clock high on a B-17 straggler flying 200 yards behind "Stupntakit." All at once one of the enemy aircraft peeled off and came onto the tail of "Stupntakit." The tail gunner, S/Sgt Richard Robinson, started firing at him at 150 yards. When 75 yards out the FW blew up in a

flaming blast, with wings, wheels and the pilot flying out in different directions. The other three fighters took out the straggling B-17.

Seven minutes later, two more FW 190s dropped down on "Stupntakit" from 0500 O'clock high. The radio operator, S/Sgt William J. Barrett, started firing on the lead plane with the radio room gun when they were 1,000 yards out. By the time the enemy aircraft was within 700 yards, flames were coming out the cowlings as it rolled over and went straight down past the tail at 0600 O'clock. The second plane broke off at 700 yards, circled and came back alone, but did not get close enough for any of the gunners to fire at him. "Stupntakit" and Lt Silvernail completed the mission without sustaining any damage from the enemy aircraft.

Lt Silvernail flew one more mission on "Stupntakit", the 12th of August. This was Lt Silvernail's final mission as well as that of the flight engineer, S/Sgt Charles W. Neal, ball turret gunner, Sgt Wilson, and tail gunner, Sgt Robinson. The crew and "Stupntakit" completed the mission without incurring any injuries or damage.

With the departure of Lt Silvernail, his copilot, 1Lt Charles A. Bennett, moved over to the left seat and took the remainder of the crew, with replacements filling in as copilot and for the other three crewmen who had completed their missions on the 12th. They flew to Le Bourget without incident on the 16th of August and were back in the air again on the 17th, to Schwienfurt.

For the Schwienfurt mission, "Stupntakit" started out flying Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. The formation began coming apart as soon as it crossed the enemy coast when it was attacked by swarms of enemy fighters. Four bombers, including No. 225, "V-Packette" with 2Lt Don S. von der Heyde's crew aboard, flying on the right wing of "Stupntakit", had gone down by the time the Strike Force was only a few minutes into Germany.

Ten minutes after crossing into Germany a single enemy aircraft came at "Stupntakit" from below. For some reason or other the ball turret gunner, Sgt John F. Greager, did not fire at it. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt Ford C. Cowherd, kept calling for him to fire, but to no avail. The fighter hit the No. 2 engine with 20 mm cannon fire, knocking it out. Because of the loss of power, Lt Bennett had to pull "Stupntakit" out of formation and head back. He tried to drop down to "the deck" to avoid the fighters swarming around the Strike Force.

By the time he had dropped only a few thousand feet, two twin-engine Me 110s came in on the tail of "Stupntakit." The two fighters played "hide and seek" with Sgt Cowherd around the tail. They would come up, fire and then drop back of the tail where he could not shoot at them with his twin

.50s without hitting the vertical stabilizer of "Stupntakit." The Me 110s knocked out the No. 3 engine and hit the tail gunner, S/Sgt Edward P. Troy, in the face, putting out his left eye. The tail guns were still working and in spite of his wounds and profuse bleeding, Sgt Troy remained at his position firing at other fighters that came at them. After running out of ammunition, Sgt Troy remained at his position, calling out attacking fighters. When the war was over and Sgt Troy released from POW camp, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Nation's second highest medal for valor, for his actions on this mission.

Another Me 109 came in on the aircraft from above. It hit the top turret with 20 mm cannon fire, knocking Sgt Cowherd out of the turret, but not wounding him. Other shells went into the fuselage under the pilot's and copilot's seats. The area was completely gutted by exploding 20 mm shells. The right waist gunner, S/Sgt Thomas J. Hunt, was killed instantly when his stomach was torn open by a 20 mm cannon shell during one of the fighter passes. The radio operator, T/Sgt William J. Barrett, was also killed when cannon fire turned the radio room into a mass of wreckage. Lt Bennett sent the copilot, 2Lt Stanley A. Dahlman, back through the bomb bay to the radio room to see if he could do anything for Sgt Barrett. He could not. When he returned to his copilot's seat, Lt Dahlman appeared to be in a daze. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt Robert G. Gaynor, manned both waist guns after Sgt Hunt went down.

"Stupntakit" continued fighting off enemy fighters, but she was doomed. Lt Bennett rang the bail-out bell. Sgt Cowherd came into the pilots' compartment and handed Lt Dahlman his chest pack chute. Lt Dahlman was sitting in his seat staring into space. Sgt Cowherd left the chute in his lap. He then snapped on Lt Bennett's chute since he was busy keeping the plane in the air. Sgt Cowherd went back to the bomb bay, salvoed the bombs and dropped through the open bay. Sgt Troy went out the tail hatch, while the ball turret gunner, Sgt John F. Greager, came up into the fuselage and tumbled out the waist hatch. Sgt Gaynor was getting ready to bail out when the ship exploded, blowing him free of the falling wreckage.

After believing the rest of the crew were out of the aircraft, Lt Bennett left the cockpit. Lt Dahlman was still sitting in his seat in a stupor. Lt Bennett pulled him down to the nose. The bombardier, 1Lt Maurice J. Sullivan, and navigator, 1Lt Adrian T. Van Bommel, had already bailed out through the nose hatch. Lt Bennett saw that Lt Dahlman's chute was attached by only one strap, so he snapped the other strap and started to push him out. Before he could do so, "Stupntakit" exploded.

Lt Bennett was small and was simply blown right through the open nose hatch. Lt Dahlman did not make it out of the plane.

"Stupntakit" crashed about a mile west of Diest, Belgium.

No. 524, "The Eagle's Wrath"

Cpt Charles R. Giauque and his crew were back aboard "The Eagle's Wrath" for the mission to Wilhelmshaven on the 21st of May. The 91st was leading the Strike Force for this mission. "The Eagle's Wrath" was leading the Second Element of the Lead Squadron, thus Deputy Lead for VIII Bomber Command.

The Group assembled without incident and began the climb to altitude from 13,000 feet to 22,000 feet while moving over the Channel. About 5 miles from the German coast roughly 50 Me 109s came out to meet the bomber stream. These fighters inflicted little damage on the bombers. However, the next attack, by at least 200 enemy aircraft, was a different story. This attack was mounted as the bombers approached the IP. As described previously, the first wave of fighters went for the Lead ship of the 91st Group, No. 639, "The Careful Virgin", with Cpt William E. Clancy as first pilot and LTC William B. Reid, the Group Leader, his copilot. "The Careful Virgin" took 20 mm cannon fire in the No. 4 engine, setting it afire. Cpt Clancy feathered the engine and continued leading the Group over the target.

As "The Eagle's Wrath" approached the target, a shell went right under the arched body of the bombardier, 1Lt William C. Butler, as he bent over the bomb sight. Close! The Group dropped on the target and headed back for the coast, with the German fighters continuing their attacks. Three minutes after bombs away, a Me 109 broke away from a group of ten fighters and came at "The Eagle's Wrath" from head on. Lt Butler fired 150 rounds from the twin-mounted .50 caliber nose guns at the fast closing aircraft from 200 yards out until it was within 25 yards of the bomber. The enemy aircraft broke away to the left, spinning downward with fire in the right wing and engine. During the attack a shell came through the nose compartment, missing Lt Butler by "a hair." Close again! Thirteen minutes later, as the Group was moving out over the North Sea, another Me 109 turned on the bomber from about 100 yards out and 1100 O'clock level. Once again Lt Butler grabbed the nose guns and began firing at the on-charging enemy aircraft. He fired 100 rounds at the fighter before it turned off to the left, with the engine smoking, and spun downward. A wing fell off as it went into the water below. Enemy fighters broke away once the Strike Force was out to sea. No one on "The Eagle's Wrath" had been wounded and the aircraft received no serious damage in spite of all the fighter attacks.

This was Lt Butler's 25th and final mission. There was a thankful bombardier at the Officer's Club that night.

Cpt Giauque flew one more routine mission in his ship on the 29th and his tour was finished. Beginning the 4th of July, a number of different crews attempted to fly a total of eight missions in "The Eagle's Wrath." On the 4th, with 1Lt Charles A. Bennett's crew aboard, a red-nosed FW 190 came at "The Eagle's Wrath" from 1200 O'clock low four minutes before the target. It broke off and went under the bomber, pulling over and going out at 1030 O'clock, then doubled back, turned and flew alongside "The Eagle's Wrath" about 350 yards out. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Harold K. Michaud, fired 120 rounds into the enemy aircraft as it went by. The fighter started smoking, rolled over and went about 1,000 feet straight down, when flames appeared. The fighter was still going straight down when last seen by the other crewmen, left waist gunner, S/Sgt Stanley Chmielwski, and tail gunner, S/Sgt Frederick J. Maynard.

On three missions "The Eagle's Wrath" had to abort because of oil pressure problems. Two other missions were called back when the Strike Force ran into impenetrable cloud cover over the continent. The three successful missions were "milk runs."

The 17 August Schweinfurt mission was not a milk run. 1Lt Anthony G. Arcaro's crew, who had flown her to Le Bourget the day before, was back aboard. They started out on the left wing of 1Lt Charles A. Bennett in No. 559, "Stupntakit", who was flying Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. 2Lt Don S. von der Heyde, in No. 225, "V-Packette", was flying the right wing of the Second Element. While the Squadron was forming up over England, No. 111, "Local Girl", with 1Lt Robert E. Wine as first pilot, flying No. 3 in the Lead Element had to abort back to base, leaving five planes in the Low Squadron.

German fighters began their relentless attack as the Group started over the enemy coast. "V-Packette" was the first to go down, soon after crossing over into Belgium. Shortly thereafter Lt Bennett and "Stupntakit" went down. Lt Arcaro moved "The Eagle's Wrath" up into the position vacated by "Stupntakit." Fighters continued to swarm in on the Strike Force from every direction. One Me 109, flying on its back, the pilot hanging upside down in his harness, came directly across the nose of "The Eagle's Wrath." The fighter went by so fast none of the gunners on the bomber had time to fire on it.

About 20 miles south of Frankfurt "My Prayer", with 2Lt James D. Judy's crew, dropped out of the formation with the fuselage engulfed in fire. Lt Arcaro moved "The Eagle's Wrath" up into his

space. Now only the Lead Plane, "The Careful Virgin", with Cpt Harry T. Lay as pilot and "The Eagle's Wrath", flying on his left wing were left in the Low Squadron. Lt Arcaro tucked his left wing right up against "The Careful Virgin" and followed every evasive action taken by Cpt Lay. Even with continuous all-out fighter attacks, "The Eagle's Wrath" had not yet incurred any damage.

This soon was to change. A few minutes after moving up with Cpt Lay, four enemy aircraft came at "The Eagle's Wrath" from 1100 O'clock high. Cannon fire streamed into the bomber. The oxygen system below the pilots' seats was set afire, the navigator, 2Lt Harry K. Warner, was seriously wounded and the ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Harold K. Michaud, was hit twice in the chest and head and killed. Sgt Michaud's body was hanging half-way out of the turret, his hands frozen on the controls, causing the turret to slowly orbit. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt Elmer F. Lindholm, tried to get him out of the turret, but saw it was useless. Sgt Michaud was beyond help. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt James F. Jones, was killed at his position. He was hit as he tried to salvo the bombs to reduce the weight of the aircraft.

Lt Arcaro knew he could not keep "The Eagle's Wrath" in the air. The intercom was shot out and there was no bail-out bell in the aircraft. He sent the copilot, 2Lt Roman Niemczyk, to the rear to tell the crewmen to leave the aircraft. Sgt Lindholm and the right waist gunner, S/Sgt Ralph E. Dearth, went out the waist hatch. The tail gunner, S/Sgt William G. Golden, dropped from the tail hatch. The radio operator, Sgt Delmar E. Kaech, tried to bail out through the bomb bay, but it was completely engulfed in fire. He then wiggled out through the upper gun port in the radio compartment and rolled off, hoping he would miss the vertical and horizontal stabilizers. Miraculously, he did.

Lt Arcaro waited a couple minutes for the crew to have time to leave the ship. The fire in the fuselage continued to increase in its fury. Lt Arcaro set the autopilot, snapped on his chute and literally dived through the raging fire from the flight deck straight down through the open nose hatch. Lts Niemczyk and Warner and the bombardier, 2Lt William F. Glover, also bailed out through the nose hatch. Unfortunately, Lt Warner's chute apparently malfunctioned and he did not survive the fall.

"The Eagle's Wrath" crashed to the earth a third of a mile from Worms, Germany.

No. 475, "Stric-Nine"

"Stric-Nine" did not fly another complete mission until the 4th of July when 1Lt Jerold D. Kethley and his crew flew her to Le Mans, France. On her next, and last, mission to the airfield at Villa

Coublay, near Paris, on the 10th of July, 1Lt Leland E. Forsblad's crew was aboard. This was their second attempt to fly "Stric-Nine." She had been assigned to them on 22 June, but they had to abort over England when the No. 2 engine began running hot. Lt Forsblad's regular plane, No. 225, "V-Packette", had been damaged on the 4th of July mission and was stood down for repairs on the 10th. On the Villa Coublay mission "Stric-Nine" was assigned No. 3 in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron. Five crewmen on this mission were replacements for Lt Forsblad's original crewmen. His copilot, 2Lt Richard C. Rodman, had been taken off the crew to become a first pilot. He will be killed when his plane, No. 523, "L'il Audrey", is involved in a mid-air collision with No. 816, "Eager Beaver", on 31 August. The navigator, 2Lt Walter H. Sypherd, flew as a fill-in on 1Lt Lawrence J. Starks' crew and was killed on 13 May when his plane No. 642, "Vulgar Virgin", was shot down by German fighters. His tailgunner, S/Sgt Enio Jule Valerio, also was killed on the same day when assigned to 1Lt Homer C. Biggs' crew in No. 406. They, too, fell victim to German fighters. Lt Forsblad's engineer, T/Sgt Basil W. Nichols, was badly wounded on the mission to Wilhelmshaven on 11 June and was sent home. The bombardier, Sam Slateon, was pulled from the crew to train as a lead bombardier. He survived his tour.

Between 50 and 75 German fighters, mostly FW 190s and a few Me 110s began hitting the Strike Force as soon as it crossed over the French coast on the 10th. The bombardier, 2Lt John W. Cheshire, reported over the intercom that his nose gun was firing single rounds only. The bombers ran into heavy cloud cover over France and the mission was recalled. German fighters kept up their attacks on the bomber stream until the bombers had crossed back over the Channel on their way out. As "Stric-Nine" was making her turn to head back home after the recall, FW 190s came in from all directions. The No. 1 engine was set afire. Lt Forsblad was able to extinguish the fire, but could not feather the prop. At this time nearby anti-aircraft artillery bursts threw shards of flak through the skin of the ship.

A few minutes later, the fire flared up again in the No. 1 engine. The carbon dioxide extinguisher was now empty and Lt Forsblad could not smother the fire. The bomb load was jettisoned. Flames began erupting from the wing behind the engine. "Stric-Nine" dropped out of formation because of loss of power and failed controls. Lt Forsblad set the autopilot to fly the aircraft, hoping somehow to struggle back to base. He soon saw that the left wing could burn through any second and the gas tanks explode. He rang the bail-out bell and ordered the crew out. From the corner of his eye Lt Forsblad saw the top turret gunner, T/Sgt Herman W. Balzer, head for the bomb

bay. At same time a stick of 20 mm cannon shells exploded around the aircraft, showering it with fragments. "Stric-Nine" was now down to 5,000 feet. It was time to get out. Lt Forsblad told the copilot, 1Lt John J. Bennett, to bail out, but he just looked at him and said "You go first." Lt Forsblad went down into the nose where the navigator, 2Lt Richard W. Gill, who was on his first mission, was just standing there. Lt Forsblad grabbed him by the seat of his flying suit and told him to "Get out of here." Lt Forsblad went to open the nose hatch door, but the emergency handle broke off. He removed the red hinge pins by hand and kicked the door open. At that instant "Stric-Nine" blew up.

Lts Forsblad and Bennett were blown free of the aircraft. Both landed in the Channel. After two and one half hours a French fishing boat picked up Lt Bennett. The same boat fished Lt Forsblad from the waters a half hour later. Lt Bennett told the boat crew he thought he had seen a couple chutes from "Stric-Nine." A search of the area turned up no one else. The two pilots were given dry clothing and taken back to port where the German military took them into custody.

401st Squadron

No. 816, "Eager Beaver"

The next mission for "Eager Beaver", the 21st of May, was a rough one for her. 1Lt William H. Wheeler's crew was aboard as she flew No. 3 of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. The mission was relatively uneventful for "Eager Beaver" for most of the trip into the target. But, this all changed as they approached the IP. As described earlier, the 91st formation was somewhat loose as it made the bomb run. "Eager Beaver" was even more conspicuously vulnerable as she made the run onto the target.

Just before the IP, a lost B-17 from the 96th Bomb Group, in attempting to form up with the 91st, forced "Eager Beaver" out of the formation. Evasive action by Lt Wheeler in keeping away from the intruding plane put his aircraft about two minutes behind the rest of the formation. A FW 190 made a pass at the out-of-formation "Eager Beaver" from 0200 O'clock level while she was still three minutes from the target. The bombardier, 2Lt Denver E. Woodward, opened fire from the side nose gun when the fighter was about 700 yards out. The enemy fighter went up and over the top of the bomber. As it did, the aircraft began burning and the pilot bailed out.

"Eager Beaver" continued on and dropped on the target. As he hit the bomb release, Lt Woodward sung out "Bombs Away!" and Lt Wheeler, mockingly, said over the intercom "Heil Hitler." At that very instant a 20 mm cannon shell from an oncoming fighter exploded in the cockpit.

Splinters of glass from the windshield were driven into the face, arms and legs of the copilot, 2Lt Arlynn E. Weieneth. Another shell exploded in the nose of the aircraft, but wounded neither Lt Woodward nor the navigator, 2Lt Joseph B. Newberry. At about the same time, flak also pierced the skin of the plane in a number of places and damaged both the No. 3 and 4 engines.

As they cleared the target, another FW 190 came at "Eager Beaver" from 1200 O'clock low. Lt Woodward grabbed his gun again and began firing at the enemy aircraft. The fighter's engine started smoking as the plane arched over into a dive down and under the bomber. Nine minutes later three more FW 190s came at the still out-of-formation, slightly lower than the rest of the Group, "Eager Beaver." They attacked in a row from 0100 O'clock high. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt Bayne P. Scurlock, opened fire on the trailing fighter at 300 yards. Tracers went into the propeller and nose. The enemy aircraft peeled off to the left and rolled over, the pilot bailing out as it rolled.

In spite of loss of power from No. 3 and 4 engines and being out of formation, Lt Wheeler guided "Eager Beaver" safely back to Basingbourn.

The subsequent eight missions flown by "Eager Beaver" were much less traumatic. Lt Wheeler's crew took her out on five of them. On the 17th of July, Lt Wheeler again in the first pilot's seat, "Eager Beaver" started out for Hanover, flying Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. The weather deteriorated rapidly and nine of the thirteen 91st Bombers, including "Eager Beaver", had to turn back soon after crossing the continent into Holland. But, they did not escape the wrath of the Luftwaffe.

German fighters charged into the returning planes while they were heading back over the North Sea. At 1040 hours and 15 miles off Gravenhage, a FW 190 came at "Eager Beaver" from 0700 O'clock low. The tail gunner, S/Sgt James F. McBride, took him on at 800 yards, firing 40 rounds in two short bursts as the enemy aircraft darted to within 600 yards of the bomber. It burst into flames and nosed straight down, crashing into the water. Ten minutes later a Me 109 also came at "Eager Beaver" from 0700 O'clock level. The bombardier, 2Lt William J. Warose, started firing the nose gun at the fighter when 700 yards out, squeezing off 100 rounds as the fighter carried to within 250 yards of the bomber. It dived under the aircraft, began weaving heavily, and disappeared into the clouds.

"Eager Beaver" sustained shell holes in the right wing from fighter attacks, but Lt Wheeler had no trouble bringing the ship on in to Basingbourn. When the ground crew was repairing the damaged wing, they discovered a 20 mm shell had lodged in the No. 3 engine wing tank, but did not explode--a dud. Had it not been a dud, "Eager Beaver" most

likely would have become a fiery mass of aluminum fragments fluttering down into the North Sea with her crew thrown to the winds and water. The margin of death and life.

Lt Wheeler had "Eager Beaver" in the air again on the 26th, but aborted over the North Sea when a turbocharger went out. That was the last time Lt Wheeler flew in the aircraft. The next three missions did not result in any major damage to "Eager Beaver", including miraculously the 17 August Schwienfurt mission. 2Lt Buster Peek and his crew flew this mission, carrying four boxes of leaflets in addition to ten 500 pound bombs. In spite of the massive fighter attacks, "Eager Beaver" sustained only minor damage to the No. 4 engine prop. Running low on gas, Lt Peek put her down on an emergency air strip between Ordfornessa and Ipswich at 1740 hours. They took off after refueling and landed back at Bassingbourn at 2100 hours.

Lt Peek flew her again on the 27th of August, once again with minimal damage. The next mission, on the 31st was a different story. This mission, to the Romilly Airfield in France, closed the final chapter on "Eager Beaver", with tragic consequences. Once more Lt Peek's crew was on board. The original take-off time for the 91st on the 31st was 0700 hours. There were three stand-downs because of weather problems over the continent, with the Group finally departing late afternoon. The Group had formed up and was going up to altitude, 25,000 feet. "Eager Beaver" was flying on the right wing of the Lead plane of the Lead Element of the Lead Squadron, No. 484, with Cpt Harry T. Lay and his crew aboard. As the formation moved out over the Channel, "Eager Beaver" started lagging behind and dropped out of her assigned position. 1Lt Richard C. Rodman, flying in No. 523, "L'il Audrey", a Spare from the 323rd Squadron, flying in the No. 4, "diamond" position, of the Lead Element of the Low Squadron, began moving to her right towards the position vacated by Lt Peek. Apparently Lt Rodman thought "Eager Beaver" was aborting the mission and he was going to fill in her position. As "L'il Audrey" started drifting over, "Eager Beaver" began moving ahead and back into her assigned slot. "L'il Audrey" kept edging over. She slid right into "Eager Beaver", poking her wing through the fuselage and into the radio room and bomb bay. "Eager Beaver" broke in two and the wing of "L'il Audrey" crumpled up and was torn away. Both planes fell apart, wreckage cluttering the sky. Debris from the collision hit No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal", with 1Lt Robert S. Gerald. "Wheel 'N Deal" was damaged so badly Lt Gerald had to leave the formation and return to Bassingbourn.

The tail gunner, S/Sgt Charles E. Allen, saw the right wing of "L'il Audrey" coming into the left side of "Eager Beaver" and felt his ship start to fall.

He went to put on his chute, but the plane started spinning downward. Ammunition in the tail compartment was flying all over Sgt Allen and the centrifugal force of the whirling plane prevented him from snapping on his chute. The plane had fallen for some time before he could get his chute on. Sgt Allen grabbed the release handle on the tail hatch, but the door was jammed shut. He then tried to crawl through the passageway into the fuselage where he could bail out the waist hatch. When he looked forward, however, Sgt Allen saw that he was all alone. The tail had broken off from the rest of the plane and was floating down by itself. He also saw he could not get out of the wreckage that way because the sides of the fuselage were smashed up against the tail wheel.

Sgt Allen then went back to the tail hatch and finally was able to kick it open. Although scared to jump, he knew he had to get out immediately so stuck his head and shoulders through the hatch. Sgt Allen's hips got stuck in the hatch and it took a lot of wiggling and pushing before he broke free. He fell for about 500 feet and opened his chute. Wreckage from the two falling ships was all around him. He landed in the water, just off Beachy Head on the Sussex coast, detached his chute and began swimming. A British patrol boat picked him up in about 10 minutes. Sgt Allen was the only survivor of the 20 crewmen on the two planes. This was Sgt Allen's 17th mission. He was not asked to fly combat again and was transferred to ground duties.

No. 132, "Royal Flush!"

"Royal Flush!" flew only three complete missions, while aborting twice, following the Keil raid. 1Lt Marcell E. Fountain and his crew flew all three. On the 21st she accompanied the 91st to Wilhelmshaven where she was hit by 20 mm cannon fire in the No. 4 engine as five fighters came in on her from 1200 O'clock level. The exploding shells knocked off a rocker box, the cover over the engine cylinders. Still, the engine kept going, albeit pulling only partial power. Lt Fountain kept the engine running so as to reduce drag, even though not providing much help in keeping "Royal Flush!" in the air. They made it safely back to Bassingbourn.

Lt Fountain's crew took her out again on her next mission, the 11th of June, starting for Bremen, but diverting to Wilhelmshaven. She flew No. 3 of the Lead Element of the Lead Squadron. Prior to the target and while still over the North Sea, a Me 109 came in at "Royal Flush!" from 0100 O'clock high. The navigator, 2Lt Maurice J. Herman, manned the nose gun and began firing bursts into the German fighter from about 750 yards out. The enemy aircraft continued up an over the bomber breaking away at 0500 O'clock. Just as it cleared the rear of

"Royal Flush!", the fighter made two spins and dived down vertically to the water, 26,500 feet below. The only damage to "Royal Flush!" was a 20 mm hole through the vertical stabilizer. She landed safely back at Bassingbourn.

Lt Fountain flew "Royal Flush!" on her final mission, to the synthetic chemical plant at Huls, Germany on 22 June. This was the first deep penetration into Germany by VIII Bomber Command. "Royal Flush!" flew Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. As the Strike Force flew along the Ruhr River it started taking flak from the concentrated anti-aircraft defenses along the valley, "Happy Valley." The Group was making its turn onto the bomb run when flak bursts knocked out the No. 3 engine, which Lt Fountain feathered. No. 2 engine was also hit and started spewing oil back across the entire left wing. The pilots could not feather No. 2, which was putting a serious drag on the plane. "Royal Flush!", struggling as she was, remained with the formation and dropped with the rest of the Group. As they came off the target, eight German fighters pounced on the Group formation and "Royal Flush!." The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Harold E Miller, and the tail gunner, S/Sgt Roland A. Carlson, were both wounded. "Royal Flush!" could not maintain her position in the in the formation, leaving her unprotected from the enemy aircraft. Lt Fountain said "To hell with this, we're going down to the deck. Boys, clear your ears, we're going down." Lt Fountain pushed the control column forward as he took "Royal Flush!" down. He pulled the bomber out of the dive just above 2,000 feet and ordered the crew to jettison all loose equipment to lighten the ship. During all the confusion of dropping down and tossing out equipment the left waist gunner, S/Sgt James E. Pratt, tapped the right waist gunner, S/Sgt Albert J. Rukas, on the shoulder and pointed to the floor. A spare ammo box on the floor was on fire and the shells going off-sounding like "popping popcorn." It had been hit by a tracer.

No. 2 engine was acting as a brake and even with the lightening of the load, the pilots could not keep the aircraft in the air. Lt Fountain came back on the intercom and told the crew "I can't keep the nose up--we've got to get the hell out of here. If we get down to 2,000 feet, better bail out." When they did drop to 2,000 feet, Lt Fountain went on the intercom and said "you should get out." Seven of the crewmen bailed out, leaving only Lt Fountain, the copilot, 1Lt Oscar E. Diedering, and the flight engineer, T/Sgt Fred E. Sneed, aboard the floundering aircraft. It seemed for awhile that the skeleton crew could keep "Royal Flush!" in the air so they stayed aboard and headed towards England. At the coast she took more flak hits and then FW 190s dived in on the bomber, finishing her off.

"Royal Flush!" slowly settled lower and lower until she was barely skimming the waves. The pilots tried to pull her up, but she hit the top of the waves, bouncing in the air. Again, she settled down to the waves, once more going airborne. Finally, about 15 miles off the coast, "Royal Flush!" floundered down onto the Channel waters. Even though riddled with holes, "Royal Flush!" remained afloat long enough for the three crewmen to escape. The plane's dingy failed to inflate when the crew pulled the release handle. Only shredded fabric came out. The dingy had been riddled by enemy fire. The three crewmen had to inflate their May West life jackets to remain afloat. They soon were picked up by French fishermen who turned them over to the Germans to join the rest of the crew as POWs.

No. 437, "Frank's Nightmare"

1Lt Donald H. Frank continued flying "Frank's Nightmare" for the next three missions. On the 21st of May, a FW 190 came at "Frank's Nightmare" from 1000 O'clock high five miles from the target. The left waist gunner, Sgt Nelson G. Sanschargin, opened fire at 1,000 yards. Tracers were seen entering the front of the cockpit. Black smoke and flames began pouring from the engine. The enemy aircraft went on down into the water. Starting the 4th of July, 1Lt Harry T. Lay's crew took her out on four missions, returning with minimal damage.

On the 26th of July "Frank's Nightmare" was assigned to 2Lt Eugene D. Cook's newly arrived crew. After the crew arrived at Bassingbourn, the copilot, 2Lt William B. Smith, was removed from the crew to become a first pilot with his own crew. There was a shortage of first pilots in the Group at this time. Lt Smith's place was filled by 1Lt Arlynn E. Weieneth. Lt Weieneth arrived at Bassingbourn in late May as an unassigned pilot. He had flown as copilot on two missions with 1Lt William H. Wheeler and two with 2Lt Robert A. Pitts. He had also flown one mission, on the Group Lead plane with 1Lt Earl F. Riley as tail gunner and formation coordinator. Because he outranked Lt Cook, Lt Weieneth was listed as the command pilot. However, since he had flown his previous missions as copilot, Lt Weieneth felt more comfortable flying in the right hand seat. He continued to fly there with Lt Cook's crew.

"Frank's Nightmare" long had been considered a "jinx ship" because of her frequent aborts. She continued to have problems, aborting on four missions and experiencing a number of engine and other equipment failures on the others. In addition, "Frank's Nightmare" was a real gas hog. And, she had no Tokyo tanks. Thus, she experienced frequent fuel supply problems.

Lts Weieneth and Cook flew "Frank's Nightmare" on July 26, 29, 30 and August 12, 15, 16. They aborted on the last mission, returning to base before crossing out over the Channel. The crew also flew in No. 487, "Ritzy Blitz", on 28 July. The ultimate "nightmare" for No. 437 came on the 17th of August. Lts Cook and Weieneth were back on board "Frank's Nightmare" for the mission to Schweinfurt. On this mission, the regular tail gunner, Sgt Edward J. Conrecode, was stood down. His place was taken by S/Sgt Robert H. McDonald, on loan from the 324th squadron. The 17th was the 22nd birthday of S/Sgt Vernon E. Lamplot, the right waist gunner.

For the Schweinfurt mission, "Frank's Nightmare" and five other 91st bombers were assigned to a Composite Group along with six, each, aircraft from the 351st and 381st Bomb Groups. "Frank's Nightmare" was No. 3 in the Lead Element of the Low Squadron, led by 1Lt William H. Wheeler in No. 069, "Our Gang."

The Strike Force was subject to continuous fighter attacks from the time it crossed over the enemy coast. In addition, the bombers were hit by flak as they passed over anti-aircraft defense zones. "Frank's Nightmare" was hit by flak at Woenschrecht, Belgium, knocking out the No. 4 engine. An 88 mm shell went up through the engine, not exploding until several hundred feet above the aircraft. But, it took out the engine as it passed through. Soon afterwards, a Me 109 came in on "Frank's Nightmare", knocking out the No. 1 engine. Another 88 mm shell came up through the fuselage directly behind the pilots' seat, exiting in front of the top turret position. It, too, exploded above the aircraft. This shell cut control cables as it passed through the bomber. Everything was out--no throttle control, no prop control, flight control surface cables gone, as were aileron, rudder and elevator controls. Lt Cook set the autopilot, but that did no good. "Frank's Nightmare" was simply wallowing along in the sky.

Just before the shell came up through the fuselage, a 20 mm cannon shell had hit the top turret, wounding the gunner, T/Sgt Charles E. Reidy, in the left hand. Lt Eugene D. Cook, sent him back to the radio room to get first aid. He had barely cleared the bomb bay when the shell came through the fuselage. Sgt Reidy called up to the pilots to tell them he was OK. Unfortunately, the top turret mechanism was frozen in a position such that no one could get past it. During one of the fighter passes, the oxygen line to the ball turret was shot out. Because of all the fighter action, the other gunners could not leave their positions to try to save the ball gunner, S/Sgt Joseph D. Hall. Sgt Hall died from anoxia.

Lts Cook and Weieneth saw that they had no control over the floundering aircraft and that

"Frank's Nightmare" was going down. Lt Weieneth said to Lt Cook "Let's get out of here." Lt Cook tried to contact the crew over the intercom, but it was out. He then tried to ring the bail-out bell, but he could not tell if it were working. The pilots made their way to the nose compartment where the navigator, 2Lt Clarence H. Blackmon, and the bombardier, 2Lt William J. Warose, were standing by the closed nose hatch, shell-shocked from all the flak and fighter action. Lt Cook got down on his hands and knees and opened the escape hatch. He started to back up so as to drop through when someone put a foot in his back and shoved him out. The next thing he remembered, he was floating in the air about 5,000 feet from the ground with his chute open. "Frank's Nightmare" snapped upward out of the formation and half fell into a tight spin, the spin becoming tighter and tighter as she fell to the ground. No other chutes appeared from the falling aircraft.

Lt Cook landed in shrubs next to a road with woods on the opposite side. He started to cross the road when two German soldiers on motor cycles stopped him. He put up his hands as they approached with pistols drawn. One asked if he were an American. When Lt Cook said "Yes", the soldier shot him in the hip and abdomen, got on his cycle and took off. The other soldier came over to see if had a weapon and finding none, also drove away. Lt Cook was left bleeding on the ground beside the road. Several civilians arrived and stood around looking at him, but did nothing for his wounds. A fire marshal in uniform drove up and told Lt Cook he had to go to a fire, but would be back for him. He appeared about three hours later. Lt Cook was still lying beside the road. He was put on a stretcher and taken to a small village where he was paraded up and down the street with civilians spitting and throwing gravel on him.

Eventually the civilians put him in a dentist's office. Later a truck with five or six other wounded American flyers came by and picked up Lt Cook. The first hospital they stopped at would not take the airmen. At another, a Catholic Sister came out and gave Lt Cook, who was drifting in and out of consciousness, a pain killer shot. He passed out completely, awaking the next day in a hospital bed.

None of the other nine crewmen on "Frank's Nightmare" survived.

The Final Accounting

The twenty bombers who went over the continent with "Memphis Belle" flew an average of 11 missions, each, following the Keil raid before being shot down or removed from flying combat. Seventeen were shot down, two were so badly damaged they were placed in salvage and one simply wore out.

Of the crewmen aboard these planes on their final missions, 86 were KIA, 84 became POWs. Of the 211 91st Group crewmen who flew on the 19th of May, 39 eventually were KIA and 50 became POWs, 42% casualties. Those crewmen who accompanied the "Memphis Belle" on her last mission and who were subsequently killed in action were:

322nd Squadron

No. 139, "Chief Sly II": 2Lt John C. Kaufmann, Jr. **No. 483, "Spirit of Alcohol":** T/Sgt Arthur L. Poston, S/Sgt Eugene C. Trimble, T/Sgt William H. Peeler, Sgt Arthur I. Berkovitz, S/Sgt Harrell H. Thompson, Sgt William A. Rathgeber.

323rd Squadron

No. 524, "The Eagles Wrath": T/Sgt Alfredo L. Davila. **No. 399, "Man-O-War":** S/Sgt Herman W. Balzer, T/Sgt Bernard W. Zimmerman, S/Sgt John W. Stephenson, Sgt Joseph E. L. D'Ovidio. **No. 559, "Stupntakit":** T/Sgt

William J. Barrett. **No. 475, "Stric-Nine":** 2Lt Stanley A. Dahlman, S/Sgt Joseph O. Wing.

324th Squadron

No. 970, "Connecticut Yankee": 1Lt John W. Joslin, S/Sgt Mark W. Margason, T/Sgt Herbert H. Harvey, S/Sgt Jearld H. Jones, S/Sgt Sidney L. Kohn, S/Sgt Willard O. Simpson. **No. 053, "Desperate Journey":** 1Lt Philip S. Fischer, Sgt Elmer L. Frederick, Sgt Elwyn J. Roberts. **No. 857:** 1Lt John H. Miller, 2Lt Roscoe V. Black, 2Lt John P. Ragsdale, Jr., T/Sgt Oscar L. Stuart, S/Sgt Ronald Taylor, S/Sgt Edward F. Simon. **No. 485, "Memphis Belle":** S/Sgt Robert W. Cole. **No 487, "Ritzy Blitz":** 1Lt Charles W. Freschauf, 2Lt Rollin P. Ball, 2Lt Edwin H. Bruton, T/Sgt William G. Dickson, S/Sgt William L. Caligan, Jr., S/Sgt Guy F. Wyatt.

401st Squadron:

No. 437, "Frank's Nightmare": T/Sgt Irving E. Narter, T/Sgt Wade H. Boggan.



No. 487, "Ritzy Blitz", on a combat mission. "Ritzy Blitz" was shot down on 11 January 1944 on a mission to Oschersleben. The pilot, 2Lt Wayne D. Hedglin, and four others of the ten man crew survived. (Joseph Harlick)



Harold H. Beasley crew. Left to right. Front row: T/Sgt Jay M. Franklin, radio; S/Sgt Edward G. Jedniak, ball turret; S/Sgt James L. Branch, waist gunner; S/Sgt Johnnie D. Cagle, tail gunner. Back row: S/Sgt Everett L. Creason, waist gunner; 1Lt Harry D. Sipe, navigator; 1Lt Harold H. Beasley, pilot; 1Lt Oscar E. Diedering, copilot; T/Sgt Mark L. Schaefer, flight engineer. The bombardier, 2Lt Mathew Michaels is not in the picture. 1Lt Walter L. McCain, Jr. replaced Lt Diedering on the 17 April 1943 mission. Lts Beasley and McCain were killed when No. 172, "Thunderbird" was shot down on 17 April. (Edward Jedinak)



Leland E. Forsblad crew. Left to right. Front row: S/Sgt Harold K. Olsen, tail gunner; Sgt John L. Fielder, waist gunner; S/Sgt Joseph D'Ovidio, waist gunner. Back row: ; S/Sgt John Stephensen, ball turret; Sgt Bernared Zimmerman, radio; S/Sgt Herman Balzer, enginner; 2Lt John W. Cheshire, bombardier; 2Lt Richard W. Gill, navigator; 1Lt John J. Bennett, copilot; Lt Leland E. Forsblad, pilot. Only Lts Forsblad and Bennett survived when No. 475, "Stric-Nine", exploded in mid air on 10 July 1943. (Steve Perri)



Joel W. Gatewood crew. Left to right. Front row: Sgt Floydstone F. Bryant, tail gunner; T/Sgt Jack H. Schaffer, radio; S/Sgt Stanford Adams, ball turret; S/Sgt Joseph J. Kominack, waist gunner; S/Sgt Frederick E. Pearce, waist gunner; T/Sgt Raymond F. Canada, flight engineer. Back row: 2Lt Joel W. Gatewood, pilot; 2Lt George E. Riegel, copilot; 2Lt Harold H. Hammond, bombardier; 2Lt Daniel A. Downey, navigator. Sgt Bryant died from anoxia when his oxygen line was cut by flak on 12 August; he was replaced by Sgt George F. Hite. Sgts Schaffer, and Kominack suffered frost bite on the 12th and were replaced by T/Sgt Daniel J. Butler and Sgt Thomas A. Parfitt. Lt Riegel, and Sgts Adams, Canada, Butler, Hite and Pearce were killed when No. 139, Chief Sly II was shot down on 17 August 1943. (Joel Gatewood)



No. 524, The Eagles Wrath, with her ground crew (unidentified). Eagles Wrath was shot down by German fighters on the 17 August 1943 Schweinfurt mission. Three crewmen were killed. The pilot, 1Lt Anthony G. Arcaro, and six others survived to become POWs. (Joseph Harlick)



Keene C. McCammon crew. Left to right. S/Sgt Herman D. Poling, tail gunner; S/Sgt Royce H. Sparks, waist gunner; S/Sgt George R. Krueger, waist gunner; 2Lt John P. Bruce, copilot; 2Lt Keene C. McCammon, pilot; 2Lt Daniel J. Ohman, bombardier; S/Sgt Mike A. Pirrota, ball turret; T/Sgt Douglas V. Blackwood, radio; T/Sgt Americo Cianfichi, engineer. Lt McCammon's navigator, 2Lt Richard W. Gill, was killed when he went down with Leland Forsblad's crew on 10 July 1943; see photograph on page 77. 2Lt Robert U. Duggan replaced him on the crew. Only Lts McCammon and Bruce survived when No. 399, "Man-O-War", went down on 30 July 1943. (John Bruce)



Jerold D. Kethley crew. Left to right. Front row: 2Lt Robert D. Sternburg, navigator; 2Lt Ennis Cox, copilot; 1Lt Jerold D. Kethley, pilot; 2Lt James J. Cullen, bombardier. Back row: S/Sgt Robert C. Daniels, flight engineer; T/Sgt Conrad E. Desault, radio; T/Sgt Alfred J. Bragg, waist gunner; S/Sgt Harold V. Stokes, ball turret; S/Sgt John E. Burke, tail gunner; S/Sgt Wilfred R. Bacon, waist gunner. (James Cullen)



Eugene D. Cook crew. Left to right. Front row: S/Sgt Edgar A. Roe, waist gunner; S/Sgt Joseph D. Hall, ball turret; S/Sgt Edward J. Conrecode, tail gunner; T/Sgt Charles E. Reidy, flight engineer; T/Sgt John J. Halloran, radio; S/Sgt Vernon E. Lamplot, waist gunner. Back row: 2Lt Eugene D. Cook, pilot; 2Lt Joseph R. Herbert, Jr., copilot; 2Lt William J. Warose, bombardier; 2Lt Clarence H. Blackmon, navigator. Lt Herbert was replaced by 1Lt Arlynn E. Weieneth and Sgt Conrecode by Sgt Robert H. McDonald for the 17 August 1943 mission to Schweinfurt. Only Lt Cook survived when No. 437, "Frank's Nightmare", was shot down. (Joe Lamplot)



No. 639, "The Careful Virgin", forming up over England for a mission. "The Careful Virgin" was removed from bombing missions and transferred to the "Aphrodite Program." She was blown to bits in an unsuccessful attempt to destroy a V-1 rocket bomb site in France. (Joseph Harlick)

Don Judy

His Flight From Mercer Island to Long Island

Tuesday, 13 September, 1955, 8:30 AM. Mitchel Field, a U. S. Air Force Base on southwestern Long Island, only 20 miles from New York City. A bright sunny morning. A gentle breeze is blowing from the north, the temperature a refreshingly cool 55 degrees. Southwest of the airfield, at the Uniondale Grand Avenue School, 500 students are settling in to begin their classes for the day. Down the way on Grand Avenue, a bus carrying 27 late-arriving students approaches the school. Students at the nearby Uniondale No. 2, Franklin, Ludlum, and Hempstead Schools also are quieting down to work in their classrooms. On Cedar, Crowell and Meadow Streets, and the other crowded residential streets adjacent to Mitchel Field, housewives are proceeding with the morning chores and tending to their babies after seeing the older children off to school. On the nearby Southern State Parkway traffic is still bustling along as the morning rush hour slowly winds down.

At the west end of the main runway sits a weary, aging two-engine B-25 Mitchell bomber, serial number 0-58822. The engines are revving up loudly. At the controls, Major James, "Don", Judy, a 13-year Air Force veteran. The copilot is Captain Richard E. Hall, another Air Force veteran. The pilots, Air Force recruiters stationed on Mitchel Field, are preparing for a routine flight to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. They will log in the eight hours of flying time for the month, as required to maintain flight status. Four other men, one an enlisted airman also stationed at Mitchel Field, are aboard. Major Judy was planning on flying another plane to Washington, D. C. today to check his records prior to assignment to Europe. The pilot originally scheduled to fly the B-25 to Wright-Patterson became ill so Major Judy is flying instead.

The roar of the engines deepens. The B-25 begins lumbering down the runway, slowly accelerating in speed. Before reaching the end of the runway, it becomes airborne. The wheels fold back into the engine nacelles. Almost immediately the right engine cuts out. Major Judy radios the control tower: "Judy making emergency landing. Prepare for emergency. Judy making emergency landing. Over." He feathers the prop and turns to the southwest to return to the field. Then, the left engine begins sputtering and loses power. Unable to gain altitude, the plane limps along at 300 feet.

Major Judy fights the controls attempting to keep the wobbling plane in the air, as the tail

droops. They pass low over Uniondale School No. 2 and along the Southern State Parkway. Up ahead lies the Greenfield Cemetery, the open southeast corner of which is being developed for new grave sites. Beyond the cemetery are the Uniondale Grand Avenue, Franklin, Ludlum, and Hempstead schools and the congested residential streets. The B-25 suddenly swerves downward as Major Judy steers the plane towards the open area in the cemetery. He apparently believes the plane may not remain airborne to reach the runway at Mitchel Field. He does not want to risk falling onto a school or going down in the crowded residential area.

Major Judy's brief flight this early September morning had its beginnings 30 years ago on the opposite side of the country, on another island, Mercer Island, near another large city, Seattle, Washington.

It was there on 1st Hill that Don lived with his mother and father, Clara and Walter, along with his younger sister, Ann, and younger brother, Raymond. The family had moved to Mercer Island in 1925 when Don was five years old. Don attended East Seattle Grade School and Garfield High School where he was one of the more popular, well-liked students. Among his friends, with whom he skied, hiked, camped and went sailing were Dick George, Jack Waymire, Dwight Smith, Eustace "Sunny" Vynne, Bob Kummer, Bill Hathaway, Henry Runkel, George Albee, Reidar Gjolme, Huncley Gordon, Bob Hemion, and Huston Riley. He was also popular with the girls, dating among others Vernita Murphy and Connie Shaw.

Don was a member of the High School track and ski teams, secretary-treasurer of the Boys Club, a member of the Boy's Advisory Board, and chair of the Finance Committee. Don also played violin in the school orchestra. During his senior year he was a member of the "Ambassadors", an elite group of seniors from each of the eleven high schools in Seattle. During two summers he served as a crew member of the tour boat, "The Star". An excellent skier, Don took part in the Silver Ski Races during the winters and was a member of a "Search and Rescue" ski unit that assisted skiers in trouble. Don graduated from Garfield High in the spring of 1938.

Don's father was the first Scoutmaster of Mercer Island Boy Scout Troop 56 so it was natural that Don was active in scouting. He rose to the rank of Eagle Scout. For his final merit badge, Don climbed to the highest point on Mt. Rainier in June of 1936 when only 16 years old, no small feat even for an adult in those days. Don and his father were

active in Indian lore of the region. Walter wrote and directed an Indian pageantry play in which Don portrayed Buffalo Bill as a young man.

Shortly after Walter passed away in December 1936 the family moved into Seattle, but the children longed for the Island. Mercer Island in those days presented a rather isolated, rugged atmosphere. Those who lived there had sort of an adventuresome pioneer spirit about them. It was that spirit the children missed. Clara and the children moved back to the house on 1st Hill six months later. Don continued to be active in scouting after his father died and John Beaufort became scoutmaster.

In the fall of 1938 Don enrolled at Washington State College in Pullman to major in Agronomy. He joined the Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity. During the spring semester he met Yvonne Cummings, a student in his English I class who was dating one of Don's fraternity brothers. Their first meeting was a "Hello, glad to meet you, see you around." The only times they saw each other the rest of the semester were in class and at dances in Don's fraternity. In the meantime, his Mother had fixed up the second floor of the family home to rent out for extra income. Shortly thereafter Don received a letter from his Mother telling him she had rented the apartment to a "Mrs. Cummings, who has a daughter who is also a student at WSC."

During the summer of 1939 Don began working for the Northern Pacific Railroad in Seattle to earn money for college. He remained out of school 1939 and 1940, returning in the fall of 1941. Since they were the "renters", Yvonne did not mingle socially with the Judy family during the summers. When he did have free time, Don was busily engaged in golfing, tennis and sailing. Accordingly, their interactions were limited. During the first summer home from college, Don did ask Yvonne how to make applesauce. He had picked some apples and wanted to surprise his Mom when she returned home from a shopping trip. Yvonne, 18 at the time, was not yet into cooking. However, she told him to add water, sugar, cinnamon and lemon juice. Unfortunately she neglected to tell him how much water. Don ended up with apple soup. His Mom was surprised.

It was at Washington State College that Don took his first flying lesson, on the 5th of December 1941, in a Porterfield LP 65 at the Pullman Airport. He continued taking lessons in the WSC pilot program through the 19th of February, 1942. By this time Don was hooked on flying and began making plans to become a military pilot.

Don and Yvonne continued their casual friendship until they knew he was going into the service. Then, their friendship became a little more personal and Yvonne promised to write him. In

May of 1942 Don enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was assigned to the Ryan Primary Flight School at Santa Ana, California. He took his first military flying lesson on the 29th of July in a Ryan PT 22. He soloed on the 7th of August and continued on at Ryan through September. In October, Don was sent to Minter Field at Hemet, California for advanced flight training. He remained there through November. Then, it was on to La Junta, Colorado for additional training until the 2nd of February 1943. Next came Blythe Army Air Base, California where he took his first flight in a B-17 on the 13th of February. The 3rd of March he started checking out as a first pilot. Don stayed on at Blythe, receiving heavy bomber training through the 12th of April, at which time he was transferred to Walla Walla, Washington to begin crew training. It was there that his crew was put together. They included: 2Lt Roger W. Layn, copilot; 2Lt Edward J. DeCoster, navigator; 2Lt Lewis M. Allen, bombardier; T/Sgt Earl M. Cherry, engineer/top turret gunner; T/Sgt Virgil G. Faust, radio operator; S/Sgt Vincent P. Lala, left waist gunner; S/Sgt Ray C. Tarbell, right waist gunner; S/Sgt Charles A. Baiano, ball turret gunner; S/Sgt Paul F. Burton, tail gunner.

During all this time Yvonne was writing to Don. She must have been a good correspondent. The "next thing" Yvonne knew they were planning to get married after he received his "wings." His wings and commission as 2Lt in the Army Air Corps were awarded the 6th of February. Don and Yvonne became formally engaged shortly afterwards and were married in Walla Walla the 22nd of April.

Don and crew remained at Walla Walla until the 3rd of June. They then flew down to Redmond, Oregon where they flew training missions until the 13th. On that day Don and his crew began their trip to England and VIII Bomber Command (later to be designated the 8th Air Force). The first leg of their journey they flew a B-17 to Grand Island, Nebraska. The crew remained there until the 25th, when they went on to Dow Field at Bangor, Maine. The following day they made the flight to Gander, Newfoundland and the next day to Prestwick, Scotland. "England at last!", Don entered in his pilot's log book on the 29th, upon arriving at Little Staughton. The crew moved to Bovington, where they remained until sent on to their Bomb Group.

Don and his crew were ordered to the 91st Bomb Group, which was flying out of Station No. 121, Bassingbourn, about 12 miles from Cambridge, in the "East Anglia" region northeast of London. They joined the 91st on the 14th of July and were assigned to the 322nd Squadron. Don flew a practice mission on the 19th. On the 25th he flew his first combat mission, to the Aero Engine Plant at Hamburg, as copilot with Cpt James D. Baird's crew in No. 178, "The Old Standby." They flew Lead of

the High Squadron. Flak over the target was intense and the formation was attacked by more than 100 enemy fighters. On one pass, five Me 109s came in at "The Old Standby" from 12 o'clock high. In spite of all the action, the plane received no serious damage.

The next day Lt Judy ferried a B-17 to Bovington, returning the same day. On the 29th Lt Judy was to fly as copilot with Lt Baird in No. 453, "The Bearded Beauty--Mizpah", to Kiel. However, after three and a half hours in the air, but before they had crossed over onto the continent, Lt Baird became too ill to continue and they had to return to Bassingbourn. On the 30th Don got in his second mission, to an aircraft factory at Kassel. Again he flew as copilot, this time with Cpt Robert Gerald's crew in No. 947, "Wabash Cannon Ball." They flew left wing in the Lead Element of the High Squadron. Again, flak over the target was intense and more than 150 German fighters, most of them FW 190s and Me 109s, dogged the formation. At least two Ju 88s also harassed the bombers. The fighters came at the formation mainly from the left side. A gunner in the lead plane of their element kept firing directly across the nose of "Wabash Cannon Ball", causing Cpt Gerald and Lt Judy almost as much concern as did the enemy aircraft. The left side of the plane was hit especially hard by the fighters. There also were flak holes in the No. 2 engine and vertical stabilizer. In spite of the damage to "Wabash Cannon Ball", the pilots were able to get her safely back to Bassingbourn.

Two-hour practice missions were flown on the 3rd and 4th of August. These were followed by another aborted mission to Gelsenkirchen on the 12th. He was to fly as copilot, again with Lt Gerald, this time in No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal." Lt Gerald became ill an hour and a half after take off and they had to return to Bassingbourn. Lt Gerald was favorably impressed by Judy's flying abilities and interactive personality. Lt Judy was especially adept at holding his wing tip close up to the fuselage of the lead plane in his element. Cpt Gerald requested that Judy be assigned his permanent copilot. However, Judy was needed as a first pilot.

On the 15th of August Lt Judy flew his first combat mission as command pilot with his own crew, to the Flushing Airfield at Vlissingen. Their plane this day was No. 712, "My Prayer." No. 712 had been recently renamed from "Heavyweight Annihilators No. 2." She had been flying with the 91st Bomb Group since January. The Tony Starcer ("nose artist" for the 91st Group) painting of a provocative, reclining girl with yellowish-brown hair, attired in a filmy, silky blue gown that had adorned the nose of No. 712 had been painted over. In her place Tony painted a scroll inscribed with the words "Yea thou I fly through the shadow of the

valley of death I fear no evil for thou art with me." "My Prayer" flew on the right wing of the Second Element of the Lead Squadron. On the way to the target the ball turret shorted out and was not operative. There was little flak over the target, but a number of enemy fighters attacked the formation. Upon returning there was a hole in the No. 1 engine and several holes in the right wing and left tail.

On the 17th of August VIII Bomber Command mounted its most ambitious undertaking of the war to date, a double mission deep into Germany. One was to the Messerschmidt fighter plane factory at Regensburg, the other, the main force, to the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt. The 91st was the lead Group of the Schweinfurt Strike Force. Four of the 322nd Squadron planes, including "My Prayer", flew in the High Squadron. Lt Judy started the mission flying in the No. 2 position, on the right wing, of the Lead Element. The bomber stream came under almost constant fighter attack from the moment they crossed over onto the continent. Planes began going down immediately. The first to go down was No. 225, "V-Packette", of the 323rd Squadron of the 91st Group. One of the two survivors, the Navigator, 2Lt Edgar J. Yelle, had arrived at Bassingbourn only the night before and was on his first combat mission--20 minutes over enemy territory.

The fighter support turned back at about 1410 hours. With no American fighters to contend with, the German Me 109s and FW 190s had a field day. Bombers were dropping like flies. Twenty-two of the B-17s in the Schweinfurt Strike Force had gone down by the time the bomber stream had reached Frankfurt and turned to the east, to head for Schweinfurt. By this time "My Prayer" was flying on the right wing of No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal", with 1Lt LeRoy E. Everett's crew aboard. The surviving planes were shifting positions to tightened up the formation for better defense against the attacking German fighters.

At 1430 hours, about 15-20 miles southwest of Frankfurt, a fighter came directly at "My Prayer" in a head-on attack. Three 20 mm cannon shells struck the base of the left wing, just below the pilot's compartment, causing a large explosion. The hydraulic and oxygen systems were set ablaze, engulfing the cockpit with fire and smoke which blinded Lts Judy and Layn. The control cables to the elevators and rudder and all the controls to the tail were severed by the cannon fire, as were many of the electrical wires. The batteries were hit, knocking out much of the electrical system. Lt Judy lost control of the aircraft and "My Prayer" went into a slow downward spin.

Lt Judy rang the bail-out bell and ordered the crew out. Lts DeCoster and Allen, opened the bottom hatch in their forward compartment and

bailed out. The opening caused a rush of fresh air through the plane that cleared the smoke from the pilots' compartment. However, the wind also provided a good draft for the fire, which became a blazing inferno engulfing the interior of the fuselage. As Lt Judy fought to regain control of the downward spinning plane, Lt Layn went aft to help the remaining crew with their parachute harnesses and to assist them in bailing out before the plane exploded. Lt Judy was able to bring "My Prayer" out of her spin after falling about 6,000 feet. He jettisoned the bomb load by pulling the emergency bomb release handle in the cockpit. At this time they were attacked once again by enemy fighters, taking hits that caused the oxygen system to explode and severed the remaining electrical connections to the instrument panel. Most of the instruments were now nonfunctional. When all but Sgt Cherry were out, Lt Layn saw that Sgt Cherry's chute was too badly burned for him to bail out. In addition, Sgt Cherry had been hit six times by shrapnel, with especially bad leg and chest wounds. He also had pieces of Plexiglas imbedded in an eye.

Lt Judy refused to abandon the plane when he learned Sgt Cherry had no means with which to save himself. Lts Judy and Layn made a quick decision to remain with "My Prayer." Since all four engines were still running, they decided to try to take her back to England. While Lt Judy flew the plane, Lt Layn and Sgt Cherry fought the fires. With the smoke cleared from the aircraft, they could locate and attack the source of the fires. In spite of his injuries, Sgt Cherry put out the fire in the cockpit with a fire extinguisher. Then he went after the large fire behind the cockpit, beating it out with his gloves, in the process seriously burning his hands. In the meantime, Lt Layn worked on the other fires, eventually bringing them under control.

While Sgt Cherry and Lt Layn were fighting the fires Lt Judy dropped "My Prayer" down to within 50-100 feet of the ground to make her a more difficult target for the German fighters still coming at them. Two fighters followed them down. Sgt Cherry, who also was manning the nose guns in between fighting fires, and Lt Layn, who was on the waist guns, fired short bursts at them. The fighters broke away without firing, either they were out of ammunition or low on fuel. "My Prayer" was not bothered again by German fighters.

Lt Judy took evasive actions in an attempt to avoid ground fire as he headed for England. Still, "My Prayer" was hit several more times, resulting in additional damage. Since his navigator had bailed out, Lt Judy had to set his own course for England, all the while fighting the almost control-less plane to keep it in the air and attempting to avoid anti-aircraft batteries. Short-circuits in the electrical system and smoldering fires in the insulation

combined to cause an additional 10-12 fires to flare up on the return trip. The smoke from these fires resulted in Lt Judy being blinded much of the time. Sgt Cherry and Lt Layn fought and put out the fires, then returning to their guns in case additional German fighters should appear. Lt Judy would relate later "We came home at 210 miles per hour, buzzing cities, factories and airfields in Germany. It was the first legal buzzing I had ever done."

The aircraft skimmed low across Germany, across Belgium and across the English Channel. In Germany, people on the ground scattered when they saw the plane, in Belgium, they waved and saluted. By the time "My Prayer" arrived at the English Coast, two engines had given out and Lt Judy had very little control of the plane. Sgt Cherry had lost so much blood Lt Layne placed him in the copilot's seat to assist Lt Judy in landing. Lt Judy headed for the nearest airfield, the RAF fighter base at Manston in Kent. As he approached the field they discovered the bomb bay doors were down and could not be closed, the ball turret guns were in a locked position pointing straight down, the foot brakes were completely out and the emergency brakes only one fourth effective, the landing flaps would not come down, the aileron trim tabs were jammed in an up position, the main inverter that supplied alternating current for many of the controls was out, none of the controls to the tail surfaces would function, and the landing gear controls were not working. Lt Layn cranked the landing gear down by hand while Lt Judy made a circle over the field. Becoming hot from the exertion, Lt Layn shucked off his flight jacket and tossed it into the radio compartment. The jacket immediately was whisked up and out of the open top hatch. Someone in England got a souvenir leather A-2 jacket.

The Manston Airbase was partially under repair, with many holes in the main runway. By this time "My Prayer" was barely staying in the air. There was no time to search for another airfield. After the gear were locked in position, Judy managed to put "My Prayer" down in a skidding landing on the grass at 1610 hours. It had been just an hour and forty minutes since "My Prayer" began her solitary flight back from Frankfurt. There were over 500 holes in the aircraft. She would never fly again. But, Lt Judy had brought his two remaining crewmen home safely. For their actions on this mission, all three crew members were put in for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Lt Judy eventually was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest award for valor. Lt Layn and Sgt Cherry were awarded Silver Stars, the nations third highest award. Sgt Cherry was also credited with one Me 109 shot down.

Sgt Cherry was taken to the hospital at Manston, where he remained until he was able to be

moved back to the base hospital at Bassingbourn. Lt Judy was given time off from flying missions and Lt Layn was assigned as a fill-in copilot on other planes while waiting for Lt Judy to be assigned a new crew. On the 22nd of August Lt Judy flew down to Manston to visit Sgt Cherry and to let him know he would not put together another crew until he, Sgt Cherry, was able to return to flight status and be a part of his new crew. Lt Judy flew almost daily training flights of one half to three hours duration through the 26th of September.

When Sgt Cherry once again was ready for combat flying, Lt Judy's new crew was assembled. The other members of the crew were: Lt Layn, again copilot; 1Lt Capen R. Simons, navigator; S/Sgt George R. O'Dea, bombardier; T/Sgt Lloyd A. Johnson, radio operator; Sgt John M. Yatsko, ball turret gunner; S/Sgt Linwood W. White, right waist gunner; Sgt William V. Williams, left waist gunner; Sgt Niles H. Withers, tail gunner.

Lt Judy flew as a "Spare" with this crew in No. 794 on the 26th of September to Meulan, France. They met the formation at the English coast and followed it all the way to the target. Unfortunately, the target was clouded over and the entire Strike Force was recalled without dropping its bombs. No enemy fighters were sighted and only meagre flak was encountered as they went over Dieppe. The next mission was on the 2nd of October, to the industrial areas at Emden. Again they flew in No. 794. The formation encountered a number of German fighters and Lt Judy's plane received several 20 mm cannon fire hits in the wing and tail. The top turret was hit by .30 caliber machine gun slugs and one of the tires was shot out. However, Lt Judy brought the plane in safely. None of the crew was wounded. On the 4th, they started for Frankfurt in No. 711, "Chief Sly III", with 1Lt Sidney Mantman as copilot, but had to abort one minute after crossing the Enemy Coast. The oxygen system went out in the ball turret causing Sgt Yatsko to pass out. His electric suit also shorted out resulting in electrical burns.

On the 9th the crew was assigned to No. 178, "The Old Standby." This was the same plane in which Lt Judy had flown his first combat mission, as copilot with Lt James Baird's crew, back in July. On this day, 2Lt John K. Carter filled in for Lt Layn as copilot. Lt Carter had only recently arrived at Bassingbourn and was flying his first combat mission. "The Old Standby" started out flying on the left wing of Lt Gerald's plane, No. 511, "Wheel 'N Deal." Lt Gerald was Lead of the Second Element of the Lead Squadron. 1Lt Charles B. Pinning's crew was in No. 711, "Chief Sly III", on Lt Gerald's right wing.

The 91st was one of six Groups flying in the 1st Air Division that day. The target for the 1st

Division was the Arade Flugzeugwerke at Anklam, 75 miles north of Berlin. This factory built component parts, primarily wing and tail assemblies, for the FW 190 German fighter. The Anklam strike force was a part of a three-mission maximum effort by VIII Bomber Command that day. The other two targets were Marienburg and Danzig/Gdynia. The Anklam mission was, in part, a diversionary effort to draw the German fighters from the other two forces that were striking farther east. Accordingly, the 91st arrived at the enemy coast one hour before the other two Strike Forces crossed over onto the continent. The Anklam Strike Force flew at 13,000 ft to present a more enticing target for the German fighters. The formation first headed towards Berlin, then turned sharply to drop on the target at Anklam. This approach was done to pin down the fighters defending Berlin long enough that they would not be able to catch up with the 1st Division formation after it turned away from Anklam.

The diversionary plan was a success. The 91st formation was attacked by more than 300 enemy aircraft, including Me 109s, FW 190s, Me 110s, Me 410s, and Ju 88s, as soon as the planes crossed the Danish coast. The Me 110s fired rockets into the bomber formation while the other planes, singles, pairs and flights of four, came roaring through the formation in head-on attacks. "Chief Sly III", the plane Judy and his crew had flown in five days earlier, took hits and dropped out of the formation. Lt Pinning tried to make it to the safety of Sweden, but had to ditch in the Baltic. None of the 10 crewmen aboard survived.

At about 1000 hours, Sgt Williams was killed by a single round of 7.8 mm machine gun fire. Just before the IP, No. 778, "Green Fury", flown by 2Lt Alexander W. Stewart, flying on the left wing of the Group Lead, No. 804, "Hell's Halo", with 1Lt Leroy E. Everett, Jr. as pilot (the Group Leader, Maj Don Sheeler, was flying as his copilot) went down. Lt Judy moved "The Old Standby" up into his place to tighten up the formation. As the strike force approached Anklam, flak became heavy. An explosion below "The Old Standby" disabled the bomb bay doors such that they would not lower on the bomb run. Lt Judy ordered that the doors not be cranked open and the bombs, three 1,000 pound general purpose bombs and five 100 pound incendiaries, be held. He was afraid that the doors could not be closed, which would cause the plane to drop behind the formation to become an easy target for the German fighters. On the way back from the target the formation was jumped by 200-300 fighters. Sgt Withers was wounded by a 20 mm cannon shell that left a gaping hole in his left leg. The right ball turret gun was knocked out of commission by a 7.8 mm armor penetrating round; then the left gun ran

out of ammunition. Sgt Yatsko continued to operate the turret as a decoy.

Within sight of the North Sea, another pass by the fighters put the top turret out of commission and started a fire. Sgt Cherry put the fire out and remained in the turret calling out positions of fighter attacks to Lt Judy. A minute or so later, at 1225 hours, an 88 mm flak burst cut the control cables causing "The Old Standby" to go into a diving right turn. Lt Judy switched on the autopilot to help in regaining partial control of the plane. Another fighter pass resulted in more 20 mm hits in the cockpit causing an oxygen tank to explode, filling the cockpit with a flash fire and smoke. This fighter, a Me 110, was flown by Lt Gunther Wegmann. Lt Judy ordered the crew to bail out as he struggled to hold the plane level. Only after he presumed all the crew were out, did Lt Judy jump.

Sgt Yatsko in the ball turret had not heard the bail-out bell and remained in the turret moving the guns as if they were functional. As "The Old Standby" was spiraling down, the ball turret mechanism was hit by cannon shells causing it to rotate to the exit position. Sgt Yatsko looked up into the plane and saw Sgt Johnson bailing out and Sgts Withers and Williams lying on the floor. He got out of the turret, put a chute on Sgt Withers, who could not do so himself because of his wounds, and helped him jump. After seeing that Sgt Williams was beyond help, Sgt Yatsko jumped. A few seconds later, at 1230 hours, "The Old Standby" went into the ground at a 45 degree angle and exploded. Sgt Yatsko's chute opened just in time.

"The Old Standby" came down near the village of Kragstedt, on the Johannes Carstens' family farm, whose eight-year-old son, Uwe, witnessed the crash. Sgt Williams' body and seven of the crew were brought to the Carstens' farmhouse by the nearby farmers where the Luftwaffe picked them up a short while later. Lt Carter was met by a "Home Guardsman" who turned him over to the Luftwaffe. He was put in a truck and driven to the Carstens' farmhouse where the rest of the crew was loaded into the truck and taken to the Luftwaffe air base near Flensburg.

Lt Judy landed apart from the rest of the crew. Once on the ground, he reckoned he was close to the Danish border, but not having a compass was not certain in which direction. He walked a while and then took refuge in a barn for the night. When the farmer came out to tend his livestock in the morning Lt Judy listened to what he said to the animals. Lt Judy recognized from his three years of high school German that he had traveled the wrong direction. Lt Judy turned himself in to the farmer, Heinrich Fuhrer, who told Lt Judy that he would have to turn him over to the village burgomaster or he himself would be in

trouble. They went to the police station at Wanderup. From there Lt Judy was taken to the Flensburg Luftwaffe air base, where he was united with the other survivors of "The Old Standby." Thus, Lt Judy began his life as a POW.

Late afternoon of the 10th the crew was transported by bus to the main rail station at Flensburg and sent to the Luftwaffe interrogation center, Dulag Luft Lager, at Oberusel, near Frankfurt. After interrogation at Oberusel, Lt Judy was sent by box car, along with the other officers, to Stalag Luft III Sagan, in Silesia. He was housed in Barracks No. 43 in the Center Compound. There, he was reunited with the officers from "My Prayer" who had bailed out on the Schweinfurt mission. Also in the barracks was 1Lt Joel Gatewood, a fellow pilot in the 322nd Squadron, whose plane, No. 139, "Chief Sly II", had been the sixth 91st Bomb Group plane shot down on the Schweinfurt mission. Only three others of Lt Gatewood's crew had survived.

At Stalag Luft III Judy tolerated the usual harsh living conditions encountered by POWs, especially the deteriorating food situation as the war progressed. Without the distribution of Red Cross packages, many would not have survived. In general, however, the prisoners were treated well by the camp guards. The main physical harassment came when the Gestapo or SS visited the camp. During those visits the regular guards would have to be more strict, requiring roll calls in which the prisoners had to stand in formation outside the barracks for long periods regardless of the weather.

The American prisoners in the Center Compound dug a 150 foot-long escape tunnel that began under a furnace in Lt Judy's barracks. The occupants of the barracks supplied slats from their bunks to shore up the walls of the tunnel. Soon, there were few slats left to support the bedding. The day before the break-out was to take place, the Germans discovered the tunnel and filled it with water, bringing to a halt the escape attempt. The Germans obviously knew of the existence of the tunnel in advance as they probed in precisely the correct place when locating it. The only repercussion the prisoners received was an extra long formation in the courtyard to ensure no one had escaped. Soon afterwards, the British prisoners attempted an escape from the adjacent North Compound, as depicted in the movie "The Great Escape." The following morning, the American prisoners were witnesses to beatings of British prisoners that had been caught in the tunnel before escaping.

Upon approach of the Russian army, the Germans rousted out all the prisoners in Stalag Luft III late the night of 27 January 1945 to depart the camp. They were allowed to take no more than what they could carry and the clothes on their back,

including only one coat. Some took slats from their bunks to make sleds, but soon had to discard them as there was not enough snow in places for a sled. The prisoners were marched for five days in bitter cold and snow, sleeping nights in unheated churches, barns and other out buildings. The prisoners finally were loaded on railroad cars at Spremberg, 55 miles west of Sagan. Conditions in the cars were little better. The prisoners were packed into the cars with no room to lie down. It was bitter cold with almost no food and very poor sanitation facilities.

After several days the train reached Stalag Luft VII at Moosburg, near Vienna. Conditions there were almost intolerable. Far too many prisoners were packed into the camp. For most, the only cover was provided by tents. Food was essentially nonexistent. What rations the prisoners did get were basically slop--soup made of rotten vegetables. General Patton's Third Army finally liberated Moosburg on 29 April. About a week later Lt Judy was moved by truck to Ingolstadt where, after a two-day wait, he was placed on a C-47, Gooney Bird, and flown to Rheims, France. After delousing, processing and getting shots Lt Judy was moved to Camp Lucky Strike near Le Havre. From there he returned by ship to the United States.

Don arrived in Seattle the 11th of June 1945. He was given a R and R leave, following which he left the service and worked for the Shorn Paint Company while awaiting orders into the Regular Air Force. A daughter, Janet, was born to Yvonne and Don in March 1946. His regular Air Force commission came through in September 1947. Don was first assigned to the 15th Air Force Command, 327th Bomb Squadron, at what is now Fairchild Air Base at Spokane, to fly B-29s. In January 1948 he was assigned to the 20th Air Force Command at Anderson Air Base on Guam. Once again he flew B-17s as part of a Search and Rescue Unit. Later Don was sent to Isley Field on Saipan as Commanding Officer in charge of closing the base. That task accomplished, he returned to Anderson to finish out his tour. Yvonne and Janet accompanied Don on these assignments.

Upon completion of the Pacific tour, Don was assigned to Vance Air Force Base at Enid Oklahoma as Base Executive Officer and to train new recruits. While there he was sent on TDY to

Tyndal Air Force Base in Florida to attend Command Officer School. A son, Don, was born in May 1952. In January 1953 Don was assigned to Recruiting duties at Sampson Air Force Base, Geneva, New York, with responsibilities for the state of New York. When Sampson closed in June of 1954, Don was transferred to Mitchel Field at Hempstead, Long Island. He continued recruiting duties with periodic flights to maintain his flight status.

The B-25 settles quickly to earth in the open space in the Cemetery, exploding upon impact with the ground. There is no fire, only twisted wreckage strewn about the cemetery.

Just 1,500 feet away, the 500 students at the Uniondale Grand Avenue School continue their studies unaware of what has just happened. Although they may read about the plane crash in the evening newspapers, in the diverting excitement of their youthful lives, the students will never realize the magnitude of sacrifice made for them. The school bus stops. Twenty-seven giggling, pushing students skip happily to the front door. They are too young ever to comprehend fully the price that was paid to keep them out of harms' way. In the nearby homes the housewives continue their morning activities. They, too, will remain oblivious to the sacrifices that had been made to ensure their safety.

Today, for the third time, Don Judy risked his own life that others might live. There was not the ear-shattering din of a multitude of bombers taking off on their missions of destruction. There were no red flashes of exploding anti-aircraft shells buffeting the plane about. There was no gravelly clatter of jagged flak tearing apart the aluminum skin of the plane. There were no screaming Focke-Wulf 190s or Messerschmidt 109s spitting out their deadly 20 mm cannon shells in screaming head-on frontal attacks. There were no exploding oxygen tanks or fiery infernos incinerating the plane in flight. There was only the simple malfunctioning of an aging engine of a plane on a routine solitary flight. Today, was a pleasantly cool, sunny late summer morning with a balmy breeze blowing over a city at peace. That peace was broken by a gentle knock on a door. Yvonne Judy opened the door to two officers, one was a Chaplain.

Today was the final time Don Judy would be asked to risk his life that others might live.



“My Prayer” crew. Kneeling, from the left: James “Don” Judy, pilot; Roger W. Layn, copilot; Edward J. DeCoster, navigator; Lewis M. Allen, bombardier. Standing, from the left: Vincent P. Lala, left waist gunner; Paul F. Burton, tail gunner; Earl M. Cherry, flight engineer/top turret gunner; Ray C. Tarbell, right waist gunner; Charles A. Baiano, ball turret gunner; Virgil G. Faust, radio operator. (Yvonne Peck)



Contrails. Contrails formed over Germany by the 91st Bomb Group on a mission to Zeitz, Germany on 30 November 1944. The bomber appearing over the edge of the No. 2 engine is No. 880, “Little Miss Mischief”. (Dale Darling)

A Pilot's Diary: William H. Arthur

Although discouraged from maintaining personal diaries for security reasons, many 8th Air Force crewmen kept a record of their missions and other activities during their combat service. A few have expanded these journals into published books describing their experiences. Most such diaries, however, were stashed away, along with other mementos of the service years, in the back recesses of attics or basements. All too frequently, these records are thrown away by family members in the haste of cleaning up the house when the crewmen pass away. From those few accounts that do see the light of day, we are able to get an insight as to the day-to-day experiences and feelings of the crewmen-how they endured and how they coped with the dangers and stresses of air warfare.

What follows is the complete combat diary of a pilot, Captain William H. Arthur, who flew 35 missions over continental Europe with the 91st Bomb Group during July-October 1944. I have edited his entries only to add punctuation and capitalization. Bill wrote his notes in 3 x 5 inch pocket books, typically with dashes separating sentences or comments.

I have annotated the beginning of each entry to provide details of the mission for that day, including the plane he was flying, the crewmen who were aboard, the briefed target, and his position in the formation. Although Bill included some of this information in his entries, his terminology varies from entry to entry. In particular, crewmen used different terms regarding the formation pattern. Often the term "Squadron" was used in place of the three plane "Element", "Group" instead of "Squadron" and "Wing" in place of "Group." I have used the more standardized method of describing the Squadron and Group formations (see page 2 and the diagram on page 27). Following each diary entry (*which is in italics*), I explain and elaborate upon some of Bill's comments and provide general information regarding the mission.

Bill Arthur was born in Orchard Park, New York, seven miles south of Buffalo, on 20 September 1916. His father, William G. Arthur, owned and operated a hardware store, a furniture store and a gift shop, along with related service businesses in Orchard Park and nearby towns. Bill grew up and attended grade and high schools in Orchard Park, graduating from Orchard Park High in 1934. That fall Bill enrolled at Cornell University where he majored in business administration and mechanical engineering. He also enrolled in the Army ROTC program from which he was commissioned a

Second Lieutenant in Field Artillery. Artillery at the time was still horse-drawn and Bill liked being around horses. After graduation in 1938, he returned to Orchard Park to work in the family business.

In May 1941, Bill was called to active duty. Field Artillery had become mechanized by then and he would not be working with horses after all. Bill, therefore, volunteered for training as an air observer in the Army Air Corps. Upon completion of the Air Observer school, he was assigned to submarine patrol duty along the East Coast. During this service Bill was promoted to First Lieutenant and later, in September 1942, to Captain. On the 19th of May 1942, Bill and Lois ("Loey") Redley were married.

When the opportunity arose in 1943, Bill volunteered for pilot training and was accepted into the flight program. After obtaining his wings in November 1943 and completion of advanced flight training in February 1944, Bill was sent to Avon Park, Florida for crew training in B-17, "Flying Fortresses." It was there that Bill's crew was put together. These included: John M. Henderson, copilot; Robert H. Boyd, navigator; William J. ("Flip") Swindell, bombardier; Jimmy E. Yanzick, flight engineer and top turret gunner; Milton Ehrlich, radio operator; Charles E. Lee, waist gunner; Charles Chamberlain, waist gunner; Michael J. Sesta, ball turret gunner; John P. McCann, tail gunner (see page 26 for a crew picture).

On the 27th of May, their training completed, Bill and his crew left Avon Park to begin the long trip to England. The first stop was Hunter Field, Georgia where they picked up a new B-17. Then it was on to Grenier, New Hampshire. On the 9th of June they flew to Gander, Newfoundland. Two days later, at 1100 hours, the crew left Gander for England, arriving at Valley, Wales at 0800 hours local time on the 12th. From there the crew was sent by train to the Replacement Depot at Stone, where the men marked time until being sent on to Bovington on the 19th.

At Bovington, Bill and his crew attended classes 9 hours a day, in preparation for combat. This continued until the 1st of July, when they were sent to the 91st Bomb Group at Bassingbourn and assigned to the 401st Squadron. After arriving at Bassingbourn, Sgt Chamberlain was transferred out of the crew. Because of lessening danger from German fighters, two waist gunners were no longer needed and the flight crews were reduced to nine men. If attacked by fighters, the radio operator would come back to the waist to man the other gun.

The crew drew their combat equipment, attended more classes and flew a practice mission the 5th. Bill and his crew were ready for combat.

Mission 1. All newly arriving first pilots would fly at least one or two missions as copilot with an experienced crew so as to familiarize themselves with the stresses of combat. Bill flew his first combat mission with 1Lt Carl M. Melton's crew. They flew in the No. 2 position in the Second Element of the High Squadron. Their plane was No. 610, "Zootie Cutie" ("Zootie Cutie" survived the war and was returned to the States to be recycled). The target for his first mission was the rocket-bomb ("V-1", "buzz bomb") launch installations near Pas de Calais, France.

July 6th

Well, had my baptism of fire today. Raided Pas de Calais area of France--flying bomb installation & got 80% hits on target. Piece of flak hit tail gun position and fell into gunners compartment. 5 hours. Flew as copilot with 1st Lt Melton.

A total of 689 B-17s and B-24s took part in this mission to Pas de Calais. Three B-24s were lost to anti-aircraft fire. No B-17 was lost. Most of the 91st B-17s received at least some damage.

Mission 2. Again, Bill flew as copilot with Lt Melton's crew in plane No. 610. They flew No. 2 in the Lead Element of the High Squadron. The target was the Mockau aircraft factory 3 miles north of Leipzig, Germany.

July 7th

Well, here we go again--this time to Germany--Leipzig, to hit airfields and aircraft assembly plants. Not successful as lead bombardier messed up. A lot of flak, pretty accurate--one of our 17's blew up--5 chutes came out. Flew with Melton again. 8 1/2 hrs--5 hrs on oxygen. Am awfully tired but must have a get together with my crew as tomorrow morning we start out on our own.

The Lead plane accidentally dropped its bombs between the Initial Point ("IP", the beginning of the bomb run) and the target. The Lead plane of each Squadron had a 100 pound smoke bomb that left a trail of smoke ("smoke streamer") as it fell from the bomb bay. The bombardiers in the other planes toggled their bombs as soon as they saw the smoke streamer from the lead plane, thus laying a carpet of bombs on the target. However, in this case, they all dropped before the target. The plane Bill saw blow up was No. 508 of the 603rd Squadron of the 398th Bomb Group. Two of 2Lt Boyd A. Nisewonger's crew were killed. All 91st planes

returned safely. One of the indicators of the duration of stress on a mission used by the crews was the amount of time they had to fly with their oxygen masks on ("on oxygen or O₂"). The crewmen "went on oxygen" when the aircraft climbed above 10,000 feet and continued to use their oxygen masks until they let down below this altitude on the return.

Mission 3. This was Bill's first combat mission as an aircraft commander with his own crew. They flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the Lead Squadron in No. 504, "Times A' Wastin" ("Times A' Wastin" was shot down on 8 April 45, on her 98th mission; only the flight engineer and radio operator survived). The target for the 8th of July was once again the rocket-bomb launching sites near Pas de Calais. The code name for missions to the rocket launching sites was "Noball."

July 8th

Sure enough--called at 0130--breakfast at 0230 and stations at 0330--went on raid to Noball target in Fleury, France. Top turret's oxygen line broke but he saved most of oxygen & breathed off copilot's system. Only 4:35 hours today--very little flak--no fighters. Good formation, no casualties. In fact it was just a cross country--couldn't bomb because of bad weather. We carried delayed action bombs that couldn't be brought back so had to jettison in Channel on way home. Rested during day and went to Cambridge in evening--bought a cap at last.

"Stations" ("hardstands") referred to the location of the bomber the crew was to fly that day. On this mission, No. 173, "Take It Easy" of the 323rd Squadron was hit by flak and crashed about 80 km west of Paris. The bombardier, 2Lt Milton Gastwirth, was killed in his chute was hit by flak or machine gun fire from the ground; the other eight crewmen became POWs. Delayed action bombs could not be returned to base for fear of a crash-landing. If in some manner or other the bombs became armed in such a landing, rescue and emergency crews would be subject to risk of delayed exploding bombs.

Mission 4. For this mission, to Munich, Bill and his crew flew in No. 610, "Zootie Cutie". They flew No. 3 in the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

July 12th

4th mission. Up at 0630--stations at 0800 and take off at 0900--land at 1840, 9 hrs 40 min today--7 hours on O2. Raided Munich today--complete overcast, PFF bombing. 1200 ships in air--mighty long trip, am very tired. Jack Leslie got shot up again today by flak. He's had more flak. We haven't had a bit so far (knock, knock).

2Lt John ("Jack") Leslie had gone through crew training with Bill at Avon Park, Florida. Jack was flying as a first pilot in the 324th Squadron. "PFF", Path Finder Force, referred to the use of the radar bomb sight, rather than the visually operated Norden bomb sight, in the Lead plane when the target was clouded over. The term "PFF" had its origin earlier when radar-equipped planes were supplied to the Groups for each mission from special Path Finder Force Squadrons. Most Groups now have their own radar bombsight-equipped aircraft. The term PFF is used when referring to these aircraft.

Mission 5. Beginning with this mission, Bill and his crew were assigned B-17 No. 069, "Round Trip Topsy" as their primary plane. "Topsy" had been named by 1Lt Richard T. Pressey after the nickname of his wife, Travis Orbeck Pressey. Lt Pressey was flying in No. 042, "Liberty Run" on 27 May, while "Topsy" was being repaired. When an engine went out, Lt Pressey had to make a forced landing in Switzerland. Lt Pressey and his crew were interned by the Swiss government. Lt Pressey soon walked away from his captors, eventually making his way across German occupied France to Spain and back to Bassingbourn, arriving on 16 October. The Swiss government was afraid the Germans might accuse it of letting interned American crewmen escape to fly again. There also was a possibility of compromise of the French escape network, if shot down and captured by the Germans. Thus, Lt Pressey was not allowed to fly combat again. After being flown by a number of crews, "Topsy" was assigned to Bill's crew ("Topsy" would be destroyed by fire on 26 November 1944 following a crash landing after receiving severe flak damage over Altenbecken, Germany). For his 5th mission, once again to Munich, Bill flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

July 13

5th mission. Same mission exactly--ran into bad flak over Munich & got a few holes in nose of our ship--a darn long haul. 9:15 min with about 7:30 on oxy. Had bad weather all the way. Took several pictures, including contrails & Melton's ship dropping bombs on rail yards in Munich. We apparently have been very successful. Very bad weather at base & had difficulty landing--couldn't see out windshield & hit a lot of prop wash.

Because of dense cloud cover over Munich, the bombing was by radar. Four of the 601 B-17s that went over the target, one each from the 303rd, 351st, 398th, and 401st Groups were downed by flak. An additional eight crewmen were killed in the air. All of the 91st Group planes and crewmen returned safely.

Mission 6. Sgt Charles Chamberlain, originally assigned to Bill's crew was aboard as waist gunner, filling in for Sgt Lee. The target for the day again was Munich. They flew "Topsy" in the Lead position in the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

July 16th

Went to bed last night at 2250 and was called this AM at 0030! Briefed for Munich again! This is my 3rd trip over there in 6 missions. Instrument take-off--visibility about 5 feet! Had no trouble forming. 91st flew lead group and low group of the Wing. 381st flew high group. We were first Wing over target with 4 Wings following us besides many Wings hitting Sarbrücken, etc. Briefed to get motor assembly plant outside Munich as visual target. I led 2nd element low squadron low group--Tail End Charlie again! Weather going out good but at target had to climb to 26000' to get out of very dense clouds. Very difficult formation to fly & had lot of trouble overshooting squadron leader, crowding, etc. Bombed by PFF because of weather--rail marshalling yards in center of Munich. 10:05 hours--another 7 hr oxy job. Getting awfully tired of going to Munich. Ran very low on gas on way home & cut RPM down to 1400 on let down. Sure welcomed the bourbon at (de)briefing. Fighter support was very good & flak was light but damnably accurate. Got aileron trim tab badly damaged & big hole in left wing near cockpit. Moved to Pilot's house. In room with Green & DeBolt--very quiet & comfortable. Have good orderly service.

Although three Groups comprised each Wing (the 91st was in the 1st Wing, along with the 381st and 398th Groups), all Groups did not necessarily fly each mission. For this mission, the 398th Group was not sent out, so 91st Group planes were used to form two Group formations. The 1st Bomb Division (1BD) Munich Strike Force included two Groups in the 40th Wing, two in the 1st, one in the 94th, and two in the 41st Wings. The 91st Group planes were in the rear of the 1st Wing, with four Groups following in the Strike Force. The remaining six Groups of the 1AD had Stuttgart and Ougsburg as their primary target. The entire 2BD, except for the 491st Group, 407 B-24s in all, struck the marshalling yards at Saarbrücken on the 16th. The 3BD went to Stuttgart. Typically, the No. 3 plane in the last element of the Low Squadron was referred to as "Tail End Charlie." However, the crews often used the term when they were flying in the lowest Squadron in the Group formation. No. 640, "Liberty Belle", flying in the 322nd Squadron, was hit by flak over the target and could not make it back to England. The pilot, 2Lt Don DeLise, put her down in the Channel. All the crew were picked up by an Allied vessel and returned to base. As the older pilots were lost or completed their missions and

went home, the newer pilots, if they survived, moved from their dorm type billets to houses with accommodations for 3-4 pilots.

London

After having flown several missions and when scheduled for a stand down from flying combat for a couple of days or so, crewmen were given passes to get away from the war and relax for a while. Most went to London. I have included Bill's accounts of his two leaves to London to provide another dimension of the lives of the combat crewmen. The crewmen were faced with a mental dilemma--what was real, life as existed on the ground in London, or the terror and sudden death in the air over Europe?

July 18

No mission--wrote to Mom--off to London on 2 day pass. Stay Regent Palace--"Lift" operator asked if we had our "Kie" for our room--couldn't understand her! Rode on top double decker busses. Saw Big Ben & Houses of Parliament--Saw Downing St, Piccadilly Circus. 7 buzz bombs came over--could hear engines stop and then "Ka-whump". Have seen a lot of bomb damage. Stood around Piccadilly Circus & watched all the women peddling their "wares"--never seen anything like it. Even newsmen sell rubber goods very openly & loudly.

July 19

Our 22 month wedding anniv. today. Bought clothes in PX today. Saw River Thames. Lots of spare barbed wired placed in strategic spots as are concrete blocks, etc. Had breakfast with RAF officer who's been in India for 12 years, home on leave. Food here is very scarce & not good. Ate two dinners last night. No one pays any attention to alarms--they say just roll over & go back to sleep after a bomb crashes. Had pigeon for lunch in Pegent Pal restaurant--not too good. Ask Mom to get baby spoon in Gorham. Cigarettes are 2/8 here! That is 56 cents! You can't spend more than 5/ for a meal and only 3 courses! Saw result of F (flying) bomb explosion 8 hrs afterwards--still digging out corpses. So much for London--met Henderson in morning & we took train back to Royston--arrived 1300 on July 20th.

July 20th

Came back here & got 9 letters! Found the boys gone on another long mission to Leipzig. 401st lost 4 ships today. Knapp (Jones went down with him) had wing blown off--Van Ausdall, Capt Martin, operation officer, and Fusco, who has had trouble before. Heard that Capt Holmes--"Sig" and crew went down under control. Hope to hell he made it. Am on schedule for tomorrow's trip.

Bill's entries regarding prices were "shillings"/"pence." The mission of the 20th of July

1944 to Leipzig was one of the worst of the war for the 91st Bomb Group. A total of eight bombers went down, with 19 crewmen KIA and 54 POWs. Several of the crewmen had been at Avon Park with Bill: 1Lt Donald R. Knapp, 1Lt Raymond E. Jones, Cpt Francis S. ("Sig") Holmes, 1Lt Charles E. Van Ausdall, Cpt Bill H. Martin, and 1Lt Frank Fusco. Lts Van Ausdall and Fusco were killed in their planes. The others survived to become POWs.

Mission 7. Bill and his regular crew flew "Topsy" in the No. 3 position in the Second Element of the Lead Squadron. This was a tactical mission to the St. Lo region of France to prepare for General Patton's Third Army break-out of the Normandy beachhead. The bomber stream approached the target perpendicularly from over the American lines rather than on a parallel course in front of the lines, as the Army had requested. The Air Force did not want to subject the bombers to the expected high intensity anti-aircraft fire by having a low altitude bomb run entirely over German-held territory.

July 24th

Up at 3:00 AM had breakfast & were all set to go to France when mission was scrubbed. So we were wakened again at 0700. Flew no. 3 in high Sqn lead Gp & bombed St. Lo area enemy concentration there. Apparently Allies are going to drive thru there. Heard that some groups dropped short of target!! Only 6 hr mission & only over enemy territory 11 minutes--very light flak & no fighters. Amused at poor scared rabbit trying to run across runway when we gunned up to take off--couldn't figure out what those big noisy things were.

One of the Groups (not the 91st) accidentally dropped its bombs a little early, causing them to fall into the American lines. Twenty US soldiers were killed and more than 60 wounded.

Mission 8. Once again the 8th Air Force flew a tactical mission to the St. Lo area in France to aid General Patton's break-out. At the briefings, the various Bomb Groups were cautioned to make certain they dropped only behind the smoke signals laid down by the front-line troops. Bill flew "Topsy" with his regular crew as Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

July 25 Tuesday

St. Lo again--8th mission but only 5:45 hrs thank goodness. Led second element of low Sqn low Gp & did pretty good job--had a couple of compliments. Surprising how just 6 hrs will drag a person out tho. I look as tho my eyes were about to pop out of my head & am tired. Had a very difficult trip home as we had to let down to 1000 ft & was it rough! Had great deal of difficulty at the field trying to land--so many ships &

such prop wash, whew! Fortunately made a perfect 3 point despite bad approach. Radio reported 3000 planes used--not surprised--we saw so many. Clear weather & crew saw a lot of the fighting below. We bombed just over our own lines. Allies are putting on big push according to radio. Heard that our artillery spotted any flak guns that fired at us & fired on them--good deal. Bombed at 11,300'!!

The first Groups over the target area dropped their bombs in the designated areas. However, the smoke and dust thrown up by the first Groups drifted back over the American lines from an in-blowing breeze. As a result, some of the subsequent Groups became confused as to the target area and again dropped on American lines. This was more disastrous than the previous day. One hundred eleven American troops were killed, including General Lesley J. McNair, Chief of the Army Ground troops, who was at the front to observe the bombing and break-out. Four hundred ninety Americans were also wounded.

Mission 9. Once again Bill and his crew flew in "Topsy" as Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. The target was the Taucha Aero engine plant at Leipzig.

July 28th

9th mission--Briefed to hit 1st priority oil refinery at Merseburg but hit target of opportunity at Leipzig. Had very heavy & very accurate flak--saw bursts all around us and very close. Never seen anything so accurate. Got big hole in wing near #2 gas tank & one very near #4 oil cooler from which we picked a big "souvenir"--two holes in horizontal stabilizer--but no casualties. Flew lead 2nd el low Sqn low Gp. 8:50 fly time. 7 hrs O2--carried 10-500#. Swindell got to laughing over the target when flak was at it worst. Broke all tension and everybody felt better. Sure like that fellow. Maj Lord told Flip and me that our crew was definitely headed for group lead because "navigator one of best to come over here, radio very good" & because of Flip and my experience. Sure am proud of that crew.

"10-500#" referred to the bomb load, ten 500 pound bombs. Major Marvin D. Lord, Commanding Officer of the 401st Squadron, had flown his original combat missions with the 381st Bomb Group. In December 1944 Maj Lord became 91st Group Operations Officer. On 3 February 1945 Maj (then LTC) Lord was killed in action leading the 91st Bomb Group on a mission to Berlin. Bill and his crew were transferred from the 401st Squadron to the 324th Squadron on 18 August, before they could become a lead crew in the 401st. However, they flew a number of missions in the 401st as Deputy Lead before being transferred.

Mission 10. Bill's crew was aboard "Topsy" in the No. 2 position of the Fourth Element of the Low Squadron to the Leuna synthetic oil refinery at Merseburg.

July 29th

10th mission (only 25 to go!). Briefed to Merseburg again, carrying 14-250# and two cartons of pamphlets (I kept one for a souvenir). Beautiful sunrise but trouble finding formation--Melton led 2nd element low Sqn low Gp & we were right wing. Had to go thru top of a front but otherwise fairly easy trip out. Flak over target was moderate but accurate--got 5 holes in ship. One piece thru Plexiglas nose hit bombardier on the knee but luckily his flak suit had slid down as he watched the bombs drop--he wasn't hurt. One hole #3 gas tank sealed itself & hole in right wing touched spar but no real damage. One piece came thru tail gunners position missed him--went out thru canvas gun covers! Another just missed tail wheel! Saw big oil fires in Merseburg & think we hit it this time. God was truly with us yesterday--hope we never see flak like that again. Had very bad weather in England & flew at 500' all across Island with rain & vis practically nil--good landing tho. About 6 1/2 hrs on O2. Stand down tomorrow thank goodness.

Although the Leipzig defenders put up heavy concentrations of flak, Merseburg was especially infamous for its intense flak. This was one of the most feared targets during the latter stages of the war. Merseburg was to the crews flying in 1944-1945 as were the submarine pens at St. Nazaire, France during 1942-1943, "flak city." In addition, 60 German fighters hit the Strike Force this day, but none went through the 91st formation.

Mission 11. For this mission Bill's crew flew in No. 851, "Qualified Quail", while "Topsy" was being repaired from damage to the landing gear incurred when a new crew was flying a practice mission in her yesterday. ("Qualified Quail" was badly damaged by flak over Cologne on 14 January 1945 and crash-landed in France; she was placed in salvage). For their eleventh mission, Bill's crew flew No. 3 in the Third Element of the Lead Squadron to the Schleissheim Airfield at Munich. The copilot for this mission was 2Lt Richard N. Broughton, a first pilot flying his first combat orientation mission.

July 31st Monday

Called at 0530. Briefed for airport at Munich primary & city PFF. Had Broughton as copilot--checking him out. Carried nothing but "nickels" propaganda pamphlets--light load. Stayed in formation on climb with 2200 RPM--32"! And brought back 800 gal of gas! 8:45 min fly time. About 7 hours on O2. Flak moderate and inaccurate--only 2 holes in ship. Flew K King as our N

Nan had broken drag strut as a result of new crew flying it. Only 2 flak holes today.

The bombers were often identified by their individual radio call letter, with the phonetic pronunciation of the letter following to avoid confusion. Thus, "K-King" for "Qualified Quail", whose radio call letter was "K". The radio call letter for "Topsy" was "N." "Nickels" was the term applied to propaganda leaflets carried by a bomber and dropped over the target on most missions. Sometimes the entire bomb load of a given plane was "Nickels"; other times one or two bombs were replaced on one or more planes with boxes of "Nickels." The primary target was clouded over so the Group dropped by radar on the marshalling yards in the city. Because of the light load (leaflets obviously were lighter than bombs), he took off and climbed with lower RPM and manifold pressure than would have otherwise (normal climb with a bomb load was 2,300 RPM and 38 inches manifold pressure). This, combined with less weight, resulted in low gas consumption on the mission. No. 304, "Priority Gal", of the 323rd Squadron was hit by flak over the target and went down in Germany while attempting to make it to Switzerland. All nine crewmen survived as POWs.

Mission 12. Bill and his regular crew were in No. 563, "Winged Victory", on loan from the 323rd Squadron as No. 069 was still being worked on ("Winged Victory" was shot down by fighters on 2 November. The copilot was killed; the remaining eight crewmen became POWs). Bill's crew flew as Lead of the Fourth Element of the Lead Squadron on the 1st of August. The target was the airfield at Chartres, France.

Aug 1st Tues

12th mission--called at 0630 but not off till 11000 because of weather--instrument take off to 2500 ft. Flew lead 4th el lead Gp. Our Gp bombed Chartres airport & hit it pretty well. SW of Paris. One ship 322rd Sqn, Stevens, got direct hit by accurate flak & spun down & crashed--one chute came out. He was high group--on 5th mission. We got flak hole in nose that would have hit bombardier's arm but for steel in altimeter paneling. Flew OR U today as N Nan is still laid up with broken landing gear--some new pilot checking out broke it!!!! Carried 18-250#'s & got 5:45 fly time--3 hrs on 02. Saw red flak again.

In this entry, Bill used the Squadron letters in combination with the aircraft radio call letter to identify the plane. "OR" were the call letters for planes assigned to the 323rd Squadron. Those for the other three Squadrons were: "LG" for the 322nd, "DF" for the 324th and LL for the 401st. No. 879, a

324th plane on loan to the 322nd Squadron, with 2Lt Arthur L. Stevens' crew aboard, took a direct flak hit just after the IP and exploded a few minutes later. Only the tail gunner, Sgt Lawrence E. Doyle, survived to become a POW. When the crews could see the "red", in the flak bursts, they were very close to the plane.

Mission 13. Bill's crew was back in "Topsy" for a mission to the military vehicle plant at Brandenburg on the outskirts of Berlin. They flew Lead of the Fourth Element of the High Squadron. The 324th Squadron led the Group, with Cpt Immanuel J. ("Manny") Klette and LTC Lewis P. Ensign in the lead aircraft. LTC Ensign had recently arrived at 8th Air Force in England. He was assigned temporarily to the 91st Group to gain experience in air operations before assuming command of the 398th Bomb Group on 25 January 1945. The Group carried 100 pound incendiary bombs on this mission.

Aug 6th

13th mission. 9:40 min--12-100# incind bombs (M47). Brandenburg Germany--led 4th element High Gp today. Bad flak over Berlin--our leader took us too close to Big B & we got a big hole in the fuselage near main entrance. Fuse of shell came thru & hit tail wheel assembly. Another big piece went thru right wing & hit #4 tank. Whew--! Flak was really accurate! Saw B-17 spin down smoking, then flames burst out & second later ship blew up--one chute came out. Very poor formation ships going every which way.

"Big B" was the name given Berlin. As Bill indicated, flak was especially heavy over the target area. Most of the B-17s of the 91st received flak damage--two of them major. In addition, a large number of German fighters hit the bomber stream. Eleven B-17s (99 crewmen) were lost from the 1st Air Division alone. The fighters made only one ineffective pass through the 91st formation, thanks to the protection provided by the escorting P-51 mustangs.

Mission 14. The regular crew was aboard "Topsy", as Lead of the Second Element of the Lead Squadron for a trip to Munich. Since the 401st Squadron was Lead Squadron today, Bill was Deputy Group Lead and would have taken over Lead of the Group had the Lead aircraft not been able to continue.

Aug 9--14 mission

7:20--briefed Munich again but weather turned us back over Germany & we picked a target of opportunity--barracks I think. Turned around in bad visibility & almost hit another Wing. We flew lead of high sqn of lead Gp. 10-500's on board. Got 14 flak

holes--leak in Tokyo lines--shot up eng sump & radio compass. Found out later we had close to 50 holes in ship! Thank goodness for self-sealing tanks!

Because of heavy cloud cover over the primary target, the Strike Force dropped on military installations at Eisenborn, Germany. This was another bad day for the 1st Air Division. Twelve aircraft were shot down and 102 crewmen lost. The 91st came through relatively unscathed. "Tokyo" tanks were extra outer wing tanks added to the original design of the B-17 to extend the range of the plane. The "engine sump" was a small sump, similar to an oil filter in function, located below each engine into which impurities drained. By turning a small lever at the bottom of the sump the impurities were drained out by the ground crews during routine maintenance.

Mission 15. Once again the crew was in "Topsy", Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron, Deputy Squadron Lead. The target was gun emplacements at the Brest Harbor, France.

Aug 11th (15th mission)

Called at 7:40 as usual & told briefing at 9:15--gentlemen's hours! Briefed to Brest to hit gun emplacements but couldn't get off ground until 1320 due to bad weather at target. When we got there weather was CAVU-beautiful. Flew squadron lead & deputy Gp lead of high Gp. Had to go over target twice as leader's bomb bay doors stuck! Picked up minor flak 2nd time around. 6:40 min today--back home about 1900!

"CAVU" was the acronym for "Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited", meaning a perfectly clear sky, with the target clearly visible from bombing altitude. As Bill indicated, this mission was a relatively short routine flight--a "milk run."

Mission 16. Bill and his crew flew this mission in No. 552, "The Peacemaker" while "Topsy" was being worked on (No. 552 crashed on a one and one half hour test flight to check out a newly installed engine on 12 April 1945. All six crewmen aboard, including the Ground Crew Chief, M/Sgt Lester Culp, were killed). On the August 14th mission, Bill's crew flew Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron to the airfield at Metz/Frescaty, France.

Aug 14th

16th today--Metz airfield S.E. France. No flak at all--beautiful weather--very good hits--flew Deputy Wing lead. 7:40 hrs. 11-500's, 1 smoke bomb. Got my air medal today--also had my picture taken by Acme News Service just after mission today. Flew E Easy today.

Another milk run. See picture on page 40. This picture received widespread distribution at the time and continues to appear in publications and publicity documents for the 8th Air Force, and the East Anglia Tourist Board.

Mission 17. The crew was back in "Topsy", flying Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron to the Ostheim airfield at Cologne.

Aug 15th

17th mission. Dept Gp lead Hi Gp again. 4-1000# and 5-500# IB's with one 100# Smk. Hit Airfield at Cologne, Germany & really plastered it. Extremely clear weather & very heavy flak over target but no holes. Made a very sharp turn off target before bombs hit. One waist gunner very badly injured in 324th ship. 7:35 min. Tremendous explosions at airfield & saw 5 different targets blown sky high and smoke and dust rising to about 10,000'. O2 system went out with a leak in Pilot's system--came back on walk-arounds! Heard today the Allies invaded S. France.

"Topsy" carried a smoke bomb since Bill was Deputy Squadron Lead. Had the Lead Plane not been able to drop, Bill's plane would drop, releasing the smoke streamer, upon which the remaining planes in the Squadron would drop their bombs. "Walk-arounds" were small portable oxygen tanks mostly used by the crewmen when they moved around the aircraft and had to unplug their oxygen lines connected to the outlet at their positions. On this mission the crew had to use the walk-arounds when the main oxygen system lost all its oxygen. The waist gunner, Sgt. Luther L. Carico, on 1Lt Phillip L. Collin's crew in the 324th Squadron, died in the air before his plane arrived back at Basingbourn.

Mission 18. Bill flew in "Topsy" as Deputy Squadron Lead on this mission to the Siebel aircraft factory at Halle, Germany. The 401st was the Low Squadron. Bill's crew was Lead of the Second Element, Deputy Squadron Lead (He used other terms in his diary, "High Lead of the Low Group"). The pilots apparently had been led to believe the Group would be stood down on the 16th. The records do not confirm such. However, the 303rd Bomb Group did lose nine B-17s, with another so badly damaged it had to be salvaged, on the 15th; the 358th Squadron lost seven of the thirteen planes it sent out. Thus, the 91st may have been added to the Strike Force in place of the 303rd, which did not fly this mission.

Aug 16

18th mission. Supposed to be stood down today so not much sleep last night, 'cause unexpectedly called at

0215! Another Gp got pretty badly shot up so we had to go today. Aircraft manuf plant and adjoining airfield at Halle, Germ--makes wings for JU88's. Flew H lead of low Gp again--Dep lead. Carried 12-500 # IB's & one 100 # smk & full gas load. Hard formation to fly--saw about 20 fighters at 3:00 o'clock & thought they were P51's--turned out to be ME109's and FW 190's! The next thing we knew we saw little white puffs at 09:00 O'Clock & thought it was new kind of flak--it was 20 mm shells bursting around us fired by 109's and 190's on our tail--4 attacked the High group & shot down 7 out of 13! I looked up to see a 190 stick its nose under one ship & hang there spraying bullets--I think it was Jack Leslie's ship--he went down in flames & 6 chutes came out. My ball turret scared off an attack from below on us and hit him--tail gunner saw a 109 go down in flames. P51's came to rescue. Very heavy flak just after fighter attack. Bombed factory and got a lot more flak--came home without a scratch! 8:45 time. Flew N Nan again--cabin heat went out--was very cold--but after attack I wasn't cold! Moon Mullins got back okay after being hit in top turret & tail & having turbos shot out. In going back he was attacked by a jet prop plane--first such attack in this war.

"Ju 88" was the Junkers 88, twin-engine fighter aircraft the Germans used mainly to lob 20 mm and 30 mm cannon shells into American bomber formations. This was another particularly bad day for the 91st. Six B-17s from the 324th High Squadron were shot down by German fighters in a period of about 40 seconds; another badly damaged aircraft crash-landed in England and had to be salvaged. The puffs of white smoke were 30 mm cannon shells with timed fused, set to explode within the formation as the fighters fired while still out of range of the machine guns of the bombers. The plane attacking Lt Reese Mullin's aircraft, No. 938, "Betty Lou's Buggy" was the newly deployed Me 163 rocket plane. For a description of this mission, see the story beginning on page 119.

On the 18th of August Bill and his crew were transferred to the 324th Squadron as replacements for losses incurred on the 16th.

Mission 19. Bill and his crew flew in No. 515, "The Wild Hare", for his first mission in the 324th (No. 515 was shot down by German fighters on 26 November 1944; four of the nine crewmen survived to become POWs). For the mission on the 24th of August Bill flew Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. 2Lt Carl R. Pifer was Bombardier in place of Lt Boyd. The primary target was the Kolleda airdrome in Germany.

August 24th

#19. Went on no. 19 today--and again to Leipzig area!! Called at 0350 and briefing was at 0410--so no time for breakfast--in fact it is 1800 and I haven't eaten a mouthful today! My first mission with the 324th Sqn. Flew same position Jack (John Leslie) last flew with this Sqn--deputy Gp leader, high Sqn low Gp. Carried 5-1000#'s and one 100 # Smk bomb. Flew DF M Mike, "Wild Hare". Had trouble with right mag of #2 cutting out before take off & was late as we attempted to get another ship but M Mike worked okay. Formed at 6000' & had excellent weather over target--hit secondary--airfield at Goslar, Germany. No Flak no Fighters!--8:00 fly time. Boyd was sick & Pifer took his place--seemed funny to fly without him. Heard Rumania fell last night & will fight for the Allies. Paris fell too--war's sure going swell. We were supposed to hit Kolleda airport but something went wrong in the lead ship & didn't drop bombs so hit the secondary target. Lead Gp hit Kolleda's hangers & did a good job. Squadron party in evening--went to bed early. Had 3 Grps of 51s route support.

Although the 91st suffered no losses, this was a bad day for the 1st Air Division. Sixteen B-17s in other Groups were lost on this mission.

Mission 20. The crew was assigned their permanent 324th plane for this mission, the newly arrived B-17 No. 220. Bill's regular crew was aboard for the mission to the synthetic oil plant at Gelsenkirchen, Germany. They flew No. 3 in the Fourth Element ("Tail End Charlie") of Lead Squadron.

Aug 26

20th mission today to Gelsenkirchen to hit oil refinery 6 mi north of Essen--in "Hell's Kitchen"--or "Happy Valley" or "Flak Alley." Anyway Ruhr Valley where one is really in the middle of Germany's industrial area & of course the largest concentration of flak. Carried 8-500 # bombs and 2780 gal gas. Flew DF L Love our new ship & its a honey, even have armor plate in my seat! 8:15 min. Bombed at 29,000 ft! Had heavy and accurate flak, no fighters. Flew left wing 4th element lead Gp. Saw B-17 go down. Had rack malfunction & only 4 bombs went away--got rid of them tho. Had very bad prop wash & almost dipped wing on landing. Went around then second time overshot! Finally got her down okay! First time I've overshot since transition! Found out later we landed downwind--almost everyone overshot to some extent. Damned control officers. Had 250 mile ground speed heading home after target--I love that!

Named our new ship tonight--"Lady Lois" & picked out picture to be painted on her side. So damn glad to be able to name our own ship & especially that name. 3rd Div went to Brest again--damn B-24's always get the soft ones. Got Flak hole in wing & one in horiz stab & one in top turret. Should have seen Henderson

jump when a piece hit the windshield in front of his face! It hit the brace on the knockout window so didn't come thru! Had 3 fighter groups, 51-47's.

"Transition" referred to the advanced flight training school where pilots learned to fly multi-engine aircraft. Bill's new plane (which he named after his wife, Lois) received only minor damage from the very heavy and accurate flak over the target. However, eight planes in the 91st Group received heavy damage; all returned to Bassingbourn. Bill forgot that the 3rd Air Division flew B-17s; it was the 2nd Air Division that flew B-24s. The 3rd AD went to Brest on the 16th.

Mission 21. Bill flew "Lady Lois", starting out as a "Spare" in the rear, "diamond", position of the Second Element of the High Squadron. He moved over to the No. 3 position of the Second Element when 2Lt Robert J. Flint, flying in No. 988, "The B.T.O.", had to abort.

Aug 27th

Called at 0530. Gentlemen's hours! Briefed to hit JU88 factory 10 miles SW of Berlin. Located at airfield. We were supposed to be 6th Wing over target--41st A & B, 94 A, B & C, 1st A,B,C, then 91st C. We carried 10-17 IB bombs (500#). Assembled at 5000 ft. We were spare ship flying in # 4 in high squadron high Gp, but filled in #3 same squadron. Had very hard formation to fly as leader made lots of turns and changed airspeed. Got into bad weather near Germany & scouting force reported that we couldn't get thru. Got separated from rest of Wing and flew over Heligoland--small island off North Germany--which threw the flak book at us! Hope to hell we got credit for a mission. Brought bombs back & made beautiful landing. Formation was doubly hard to fly 'cause one of our flaps kept creeping down! Couldn't figure out what the trouble was for a long time. Flew our DF L again.

Had following schedule today.

Stations 0820

Taxing 0900

Take off 0920

Leave base 1017

ETR 1910 !

I'm beginning to think that prop wash, some of the formation flying and weather are our worst enemies in the war--with flak and fighters a close second.

The bomb load was 10 M-17 Incendiary Bombs, each weighing 500 pounds and containing 110 4-pound magnesium incendiaries. The 91st was the third Group in the 1st Wing, following the 381st and 398th, on this mission.

London Revisited

Bill was given another pass for London, three days this time, after completing his 21st mission. These are his notes from that trip.

Aug 29th

Started on Pass at 1100 & took off for London, arriving there about 1400--bus to Piccadilly & went to Jules Club (American Red Cross officers club) but they were full up--directed me up Duke St to Reindeer Club ARC--passed Dunhill's exclusive shop on Duke St & stopped in--bought napkin rings for Loey's birth gift & piece of stone from Parliament building that was knocked down in blitz of May 1941--made into ash tray--for Mom's birthday--tried to buy cigars for Pop (Lois' Dad), but a box costs £5!! Bought him some tobacco instead. Went then to Reindeer & got a bed for the night. Walked around Oxford St to PX & bought gloves, tie, sox & tried to buy field jacket Mom gave me for birthday, but couldn't get my size! Bought film on Oxford Street--Westminster Photo Exchange at 111 Oxford. Walked down to Piccadilly Circus & had dinner at big restaurant there & went to see Bing Crosby in "Going My Way". Went back to Red Cross & had late snack there.

Aug 30th

Up at 0900 & breakfast in Red Cross & arranged tour around city for afternoon. Took long walk down the Mall & saw Lady Astor house, old German Embassy, part of which is destroyed by bombs & down to Buckingham Palace. Took several pictures in vicinity. Walked by the gates of the Palace & the resplendent Coldstream Guard stopped his pacing, did an elaborate left face & even more elaborate and very snappy salute--I felt flattered. Several citizens stopped and explained things to me purely voluntarily--people are very friendly & helpful. Walked thru St James gardens back to State buildings & Big Ben--up Whitehall. Stopped & chatted with Bobby guarding entrance to Downing St. He slipped me in real close to No. 10 & I got a good picture. Walked on up & took pictures of Trafalgar Sq--of Nelson's and King George IV's statues. Ate ice cream at a milk bar on Trafalgar. Proceeded up past Piccadilly to Berkley Square where I found Charles St and the English Speaking Union, from which tour was to start. A Mrs Weatherly conducted another officer--Capt Simons, med off--and me in a taxi driven by an old man (probably 70 anyway) around the city. She was most interesting, altho a trifle too old for anything but historical interest--started down St. Jame's Place & saw famous exclusive men's clubs--around Piccadilly--down to Trafalgar Sq where she pointed out St. Martin's Church--one of Sir Christopher Wren's churches (he built about 50, incl St. Paul's & West Abbey), first Church to broadcast over air. Up the Strand which used to be bank of the river (Thames, of course).

Saw Savoy Hotel, Fleet St (or Barrister's Alley!) & all the extensive damage done in that area. Here was one of Sir Chr Wren's churches which has been completely gutted by bombs during blitz. Saw St Paul's Cathedral from outside--beautiful large structure made much more visible now that buildings around it have been bombed down for quite a distance. Traveled across London Bridge & back across Tower Bridge to Tower of London--where Henry VIII's wives all lost their heads! Saw all the guards in their Medieval uniforms around. Came back to St. Paul's & looked inside. Saw Lloyds of London & several big banks--then to Guildhall--famous meeting place of all the guilds in the old days and place where important banquets are still held. First Americans to arrive for this war were feasted there--that was last banquet held there. Guide showed us crypt & what is left of remainder of building after blitz--beautiful old place was almost ruined entirely. Saw Richard Whittington's window--made of bottle glass & still with same hinges & catch after all these years. Drove down the Thames to Big Ben & then to Westminster Abbey where we saw many graves & tables to notables such as Disraeli, Longfellow, Hardy, kings & queens, etc. That was end of tour so I went back to Red Cross & cleaned up & ate supper there. Then went to see Gary Cooper in "Story of Dr. Wassel." Stopped in at Oddeum's Bar for a rum & lime--good--first rum I've had over here. Got to talking to a good looking fellow who insisted on buying me one--we flipped & he lost--so another rum. So home to bed after another snack. Very few Buzz bombs.

Aug 31st

Dad's birthday today--he'd be 62. Up at 0900 & breakfast at Red Cross. Then taxi to Kings Cross for train. Met Henderson quite by accident at the station & we rode back together. John & Bob got their promotions today--they are 1st Lieuts.

Bill's father had died in July 1943.

Mission 22. Back from leave and in "Lady Lois" again for a flight to the Opau synthetic oil plant at Ludwigshaven. Bill flew Lead of the Fourth Element of the Lead Squadron.

Sept 8th

Well a mission at last--No. 22. Up at 0400--briefing at 0500 for Ludwigshaven, to hit the big chemical plant there with 6-1000# bombs. Flew lead 4th element Lead Gp. Entered thru France & sure seemed good to cross France as friendly territory for a change. Saw lots of airfields and towns that had been heavily shelled & torn up. Went in near Le Harve & down just N of Paris & across German border--no flak & no fighters so far--high front to go over. Made instrument approach & visual run on target--bombed thru clouds. We were 5th Wing to hit target. The flak was extremely dense and very accurate, both barrage and tracking--88 mm & 105 mm. Biggest

bursts I've ever seen with very red clusters and a terrific concussion upon explosion. Deputy Wing lead was hit & started burning just above & to right of us & I got picture of him (found out later pilot was O'Toole of 324th--was hit in foot & also elevator control cable was cut & he finally landed on AFCE!). Flak was worst I've seen--very intense. Many ships were hit and one--pilot McCarty of 322nd blew up. Weeks of 324 (lived in room next to me) spiraled down out of control. Beasley--flying my left wing was hit in head--down from top--by fragment of 105 mm & it pierced his flak helmet & flying helmet & into his skull. He's paralyzed now but may live. Our lead ship's Mickey navigator who we'd been kidding before take off about being "Mr 5' x 5" was hit in the leg rather seriously & a gunner on same ship (not 50' from us) got flak thru one shoulder but will recover. We had 30 hits (about 50 holes) in our ship but no casualties, thank heavens. Bob Boyd's cap which he had hung over the drift meter with his headset was badly torn by a hit in the nose & his headset's wires were cut. Had 3 hits in gas tanks--thank heaven for self sealing tanks. One hit cut the deicer system lines in the right wing. Another came into radio room & smashed desk in front of the radio operator, but no casualties. God is truly with us. Lee was riding in the ball turret today. He got so mad at the flak he fired the ball's guns at the flak guns 25000' below him! Had to laugh at that. Tail gunner reported that Beasley's ship missed us by inches when he was hit & careened off. Another ship with a fire in #4 came down on top of us & top turret was on the ball & warned me so we got out of his way. Lady Lois is sure a good ship--climbs beautifully. Ambulances were really busy when we came back--many casualties. Henderson made perfect landing--he's been doing very well lately. Had four letters when I got back--one from Loey, one from Marty (Tom & Jack) and two from Wheye Brewer. I developed film tonight--came out beautifully. Will print tomorrow if no mission. Flew 7:35 min today. Found out later that Lady Lois was laid low for 3-4 days by hits in tanks which necessitated complete changes. The temperature was 38° below zero!

"AFCE" referred to the Automatic Flight Control Equipment", i.e., "autopilot" of the plane. "Tracking flak" referred to the German anti-aircraft guns aiming at a specific plane, typically closing in from the rear. Alternatively, the flak batteries would perceive the route of the bomb run and throw up a concentration ("barrage") of shells exploding at the altitude of the planes and through which they would have to fly to the target. The flak over Ludwigshaven the 8th was the worst the 91st had encountered in its 227 missions to date. Most planes received some sort of damage, many major. 1Lt David McCarty was flying Deputy Lead in the Low Squadron when hit; seven of the nine crewmen, including Lt McCarty were killed. The copilot, 2Lt Gilbert B. Willis, of Lt Week's plane was killed by a piece of flak that went through his neck. It would be

several weeks before the Micky Operator (the radar bombsight operator), 1Lt Gordon H. Lowe, would be able to fly another mission. "Lady Lois" was so badly damaged she would not fly another mission until the 21st of September.

Mission 23. Since "Lady Lois" was being repaired, the plane assigned to Bill this day was No. 333, "Wee Willie", on loan from the 322nd Squadron ("Wee Willie" was shot down on 8 April 1945 while on her 128th mission. Only the pilot of the nine crewmen survived). Bill's crew flew No. 3 in the Fourth Element of the High Squadron for a return trip to the Apau synthetic oil plant at Ludwigshaven

Sept 9 (Sat)

23rd mission. Carried 12-500# IB's or 6000#. Flew LG W 'cause Lady Lois is incapacitated from yesterday. Before take off we listened to a German news broadcast in English which gave the names of several Am. Prisoners of war. Ordinary take off & climb. Flew straight line from England to same target as yesterday--Ludwigshaven--same chemical works. We were left wing on 4th el of high Gp. The 324th had only 6 ships in commission today and 4 of those didn't fly yesterday! All was well to the IP--then hell broke loose. The last minute Col. Berry (leader) decided to bomb by individual groups instead of by Wing as previously planned--so they all had to scramble to get positions--our element leader got thrown very wide on the sharp turn & didn't get back in till too late to get position & we were left high and dry all by ourselves. Had been seeing a lot of planes in area--fighters--so I peeled off from him & took out under full power for the low group & flew the lead of 4th element. Don't know what became of their regular 4th el. Stayed there for rest of mission. Flak was very bad over the target but evasive action helped a lot. We missed the target completely I think--couldn't see the ground tho. Then made turn to get back in Wing formation. Over the target Flip moved back to near Nav's position & when he knelt on chin turret he was thrown up in air by a burst of flak right on our nose. A big piece came thru heavy metal cheek gun support & down thru his oxygen panel--would have hit him right in the ear had he been in his usual position & would undoubtedly have killed him or injured him seriously! Again God was with us as He has been every time we've flown. Had eight hits on ship but none serious. Caught some flak on way out but no damage. On way home we saw the hedgerows that we've been reading about all thru France. Heard an Eng. news broadcast while we were over France on the way out describing our mission!! Saw & took picture of Dunkirk beach & city. Seems that all of France is pot-marked by shells & bombs! When we got back we heard that Weeks, downed yesterday, crashed in France & altho copilot was killed rest of crew is okay. Also Art Hultin who went down with Capt Bill Martin is a PW. We were 3rd Wing

of 11 Wings over target. Hope the others did better than we! Got 5 letters. 6:45 min.

As had been experienced on the 8th, heavy flak was encountered over the target. No. 594, "Strictly GI", of the 323rd Squadron was hit hard by flak after the target and went down, exploding in midair three minutes later; five of the nine crewmen were killed. Another six aircraft from the 91st received major damage.

Mission 24. Bill's crew flew in No. 298, "White Cargo" for this mission ("White Cargo was shot down 2 November 1994; six of the nine crewmen were killed). The 324th and 322nd Squadrons joined a Squadron from the 381st Group, flying out of Ridgewell airbase, to form a "Composite Group" in the 1st CBW. The 323rd and 401st Squadrons were to fly as the High Group of the 41st Combat wing. However, the 401st was delayed from taking off because of ground fog at Bassingbourn. The Squadron failed to catch up with the 323rd and returned to base. The 1st CBW went to the Daimler-Benz works at Stuttgart, Germany. Bill's crew flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the High Squadron in the 91st formation.

Sept 10

24th mission. Today this Group put up two groups--one joined 41st (Combat Wing) for their high Gp and we joined Ridgwell (381st Bomb Group) for their high Gp in 1st A Wing. Assembled late as we had a very dense ground fog & couldn't take off. Finally got into formation just before leaving base. Flew rt wing of 2nd Sqn, H Gp. Crossed into France & over to near Ludwigshaven to hit Daimler Benz factory 12 mi SW of Karlsruhe. Assembly plant for trucks and tractors, tanks and ammunition. Blew the damn thing sky high--literally! We saw smoke rising rapidly in a column at least 10000 ft high! We were 4th Wing over target--excellent weather--carried 12 M-17 IB's again--6000#. Saw only 4 bursts of flak myself--there was much more but all below us! No one in our formation was hurt. We didn't get a hole in our ship. LG A (Lady Lois is still laid up. Had to change 3 gas tanks & 2 leading edges as well as glass, panels, etc). It was 38° below zero up there. We really hit that target. Saw a B-17 go down in flames & 6 chutes came out (from another formation). We saw artillery shells landing in a town near Metz & Nancy--where Gen Patton's forces are fighting on the Moselle River. Leader stalled us out over the field just before landing. Got 6:40 time today.

The 41st CBW was recalled because of bad weather over the target. The 1st CBW, including the 324th Squadron, was able to drop on its target.

Mission 25. The crew was in No. 552, "The Peacemaker", to the synthetic oil plants at Lutzendorf, Germany. They flew No. 3 of the Fourth Element of the Low Squadron, "Tail End Charlie." The 322nd Squadron, with Cpt Jerrold Newquist flying as copilot, and Group Leader, with Cpt Karl W. Thompson in No. 562, "Evenin' Folks How Y'All", led the Group.

Sept 11

25th mission. Four missions in as many days--wow! Am very tired as can easily be imagined. Went to 30 mi W of Leipzig (again!) 13 mi SW Halle to hit oil refinery there. We were 8th CBW over target carrying 10--500# (5000#) and flying left w 4th el low Gp. Took us 7:20 min today. Had good trip over & no flak until target. Fighters in area but we didn't see them--sky full of P51's thank goodness. Lots of flak over the target but Gp leader made very good evasive action and excellent sharp turn off target after bombs away so we escaped any damage. Got some good pictures of flak, bombs away etc. Element leader screwed up & got in too close & we had some very narrow escapes from hitting other ships etc. Hard formation to fly. Had to laugh at Swindell's remark about the evasive action he takes in the nose! Top turret went out on way over, but Yanzick was on the ball as usual & fixed it--bad relay switch. Crossed over Leige and Aachen not knowing that Americans had just taken Leige & were pressing on Aachen. Went over Luxemburg too & then read in today's Stars and Stripes that Yanks had entered there. Figured out--today we've dropped over 57 tons of explosives on Nazi's plus nickels--have flown 190 combat hours--an average of 7.5 hrs per mission! That's about 125 hr of oxygen! Radio says 130 enemy fighters were shot down by our fighters today--don't know how many our bombers got. We caught a little flak at 14000' just off the Belgian coast on the way home--must have come from a ship.

In spite of the heavy flak over the target, the 91st had no losses. However, was a bad day for the 1st Air Division in general. Thirteen B-17s, eight from the 92nd Bomb Group alone, were shot down on the mission.

Mission 26. "Lady Lois" was available for Bill and his crew for the mission to the marshalling yards at Mainz. They flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the High Squadron.

Sept 21

Hey, I'm a Father. "Lois Anne born both fine" greeted me when I got home from today's mission. Wow!!!! Had a good flight today. Instrument take off and climbed 7000ft thru soup--very thick. Carried 3000# of pamphlets to Mainz, Germany for my 26th raid. Flew #2 on high Sqn high Gp for 6:35 min. Hit rail marshalling yds & really hit them good at 27000'. Had to

make inst let down from 6000ft when we got back--soup was very thick & vis was only about 1/2 mile! Let down to 800' & had terrific rat race with a million other B17's in pattern. Couldn't see them til right on top of them. Relied on flares at end of runway to see runway. Couldn't make a normal approach--had to go a round 3 times because of the other ships. Then when we came around 4th time we had to follow a ship in & he missed runway entirely & went around. We saw runway off to left & made a quick turn over with full flaps & no power & set down after 2 sharp turns lining up for a perfect 3 point landing!!! Crew congratulated me on the excellent landing. Lee said "you've sure got what it takes in tight pinches." I sure didn't want to go around again in that airplane saturated soup! Our trucks didn't pick us up for a long time so from fatigue and nervousness from the landing ordeal & then waiting a long time at the plane, I was in fine shape. Then came the big news & I was on top of the world!! Seems as if the whole base knows about it now! Everyone's congratulating me on becoming a pop. Even John Henderson smoked a cigar!!

Because of the frequent dense low clouds and fog, take-offs and landings in East Anglia were often almost as dangerous as were the flights over the continent. A lot of planes and crews were lost before leaving England or after surviving the fighters and flak on the mission. On one of his approaches today, Bill saw at the last minute a B-17 coming directly at him. Only his quick reflexes avoided a collision that would have killed everyone on both bombers.

Mission 27. Once again in "Lady Lois", as Lead of the Third Element, Low Squadron on the mission to Frankfurt.

Sept 25th

27th mission--flew lead 3rd Sqn Low Gp. Carried 12-500#. 6:00 hrs. Went to Frankfurt & bombed PFF on city. Only two small flak holes. Flip discovered mal arrangement of bombs before take off thus eliminating wasted mission--good boy.

A milk run.

Mission 28. In "Lady Lois" in their now usual position in the Squadron formation, Lead of the Third Element. For this mission to the Ford Motor factory at Colonge, the 324th was the Lead Squadron

Sept 27th

28th mission. Led 3rd Sqn in Lead Gp. Flew DF L as usual--good ol' Lady Lois. Carried 12-500# to Ford Plant 7 mi NW of Cologne--PFF tho & had to hit city. Yanzick discovered bad rip in tire before take off & wheel had to be changed. Had good--excellent--formation. Easy to fly. Received several compliments on good

formation & made an excellent landing--hardly knew myself that we were on ground. Short mission again--6:05 hr.

Yet another milk run. Bill's missions seemed to be getting more and more routine. Only a total of two B-17s had been lost from the entire 1st Air Division on Bill's last four missions. However, the 445th Group of the 2nd AD lost 25 B-24s shot down and three others that were destroyed when they crash-landed following damage from enemy action.

Mission 29. Still in "Lady Lois" as Lead of the Third Element of the High Squadron. The primary target was the synthetic oil plant at Magdeburg.

Sept 28th

29th mission. 8:00 hrs. 10-500#s. Lead of 3rd Sqn in high Gp. Col. Berry led again so it was a rough job. His last one thank goodness! Briefed to hit oil refinery at Magdeburg. Lead & low bombed primary but missed very badly. We didn't drop so went to secondary & dropped on PFF of lead Gp. Don't know what we hit. Hard formation to fly. No flak damage & didn't see any fighters. Altho that's the fighter area & other Wings were attacked. Heard that B24 Grp lost 28 out of 36 planes yesterday! Lost to fighters--B24s are such good protection for us! Found out later we had flak hit in supercharger manifold of # 2. Boy if that had been 1 inch lower, it would have blown up the bucket wheel--with 12 tons force on each bucket!!

A malfunctioning of the radar ("Mickey") bomb sight on the Lead Plane caused the Lead and Low Squadrons to miss the target. The 324th Squadron recognized the problem and held its bombs. The 91st dropped on the airfield at Eschwege, Germany. This was an exceptionally bad day for the 8th Air Force. The 1st Air Division Strike Force was hit hard by fighters. Twenty-three B-17s were lost, eleven from the 303rd Group and seven from the 457th Group. Fortunately for the 91st, the P-51 fighter escorts engaged the German fighters approaching the Group. Only a few went through the 91st formation. B-24 bombers could not withstand as much structural damage as could B-17s. Thus, German fighters were thought to go after any B-24s in the Strike Force before attacking B-17s in an attempt to maximize the "return" from their attacks.

Mission 30. In "Lady Lois" in same position in the Squadron formation, with the 324th flying as Low Squadron. Target was Munster, Germany.

Sept 30th

30th mission! The ninth this month--only five to go! Briefed to lead 3rd Sqn low Gp to Munster to hit two bridges there with 6-1000# bombs. Assembled at 20000' & had real good formation--saw no flak!! PFF over target area but our mickey operator messed up and we didn't hit the PFF target either, which was rail yards in Munster. Lead ship developed fire in cockpit & had to abort coming home. Capt Thompson from Avon Park was flying deputy & brought us home--made damn nice 3 point landing. 5:35--short mission--would like 5 more of same.

Although an easy mission the bombing was ineffective. Maj Karl W. Thompson, in No. 562, "Evenin' Folks! How Y'All", was the Group Lead. Cpt Walter W. Thompson, in No. 754, took over the Group Lead when No. 562 had to abort the mission.

Mission 31. In "Lady Lois", as per usual, again as Lead of the Third Element. This time the 324th was the Lead Squadron. Target was the tank factory at Nurnberg.

Oct 3

31st mission--gettin' on toward end now. Went to Nurnberg to hit tank factory but it was PFF so we hit big rail station in city--really hit it, too, according to my ball turret who could see it after we passed over. Quite a long mission 8:55--longest in some time. Had excellent fighter support & very little flak for us as we were first Wing over target leading Division but succeeding Wings caught Hell. Flew lead of 3rd Sqn in Lady Lois and carried 5-1000#ers. Weather bad so we assembled at 20000ft & didn't let down again til French coast--about 7 hrs on O2. Only two flak holes today. Beasley came back here today from the hospital with his head shaved and an ugly scar on the top of it--he'll be all right, tho despite flak hitting very close to his brain. He was paralyzed for awhile but up and walking around now. Sure glad to see him.

Although Lt Freeman Beasley eventually recovered from his head wounds, he continued to experience neurological problems and did not fly again. Lt Beasley passed away in December 1996.

Mission 32. In "Lady Lois" and normal position in the 324th Squadron, flying this day as the High Squadron. Target was the aircraft factories at Neubrandenburg, Germany.

Oct 6th

32nd mission. A long haul today--Neubrandenburg in North Eastern Germany to hit & demolish (& we did) JU88 factory and airfield. Crossed North Sea at 5000ft & climbed across Denmark to 20000. Other groups preceded us across our target and on. Heinies probably thought we were all going on & came

out of their foxholes just as we smacked them. Excellent visibility & excellent results. 9:40 min today! No flak & no fighters on us. Flew Lady Lois on her 12th mission. Heard that Jack Leslie's ball turret op & radio op have been heard from & are PW--so Jack ought to be okay. Also Ray Jones & Knapp are PW. Only 3 hours on O2 today--seemed good.

The bombing results were the best the 91st had achieved in the 241 missions flown to date. Bill would learn after the war his friend, Jack Leslie, was killed when his plane exploded in the air on the 16 August mission.

Mission 33. A long mission with the primary target the synthetic oil plant at Brux, Czechoslovakia. In "Lady Lois", as the usual Lead of the Third Element in the Low Squadron.

Oct 7th

33 missions! The end is in sight!--in fact the end (the wrong end) was in sight today--the leader of the Group (formerly called Wing) got lost and lead us all over the worst flak area of Germany. Went to Czechoslovakia today! Briefed to hit Brux oil refinery as prime visual target. Leader gave us a very difficult formation to fly--turn all the time. Got to the target area & he decided to hit secondary as clouds were over primary. Well he couldn't find secondary so we tooled all over & finally hit a target of opportunity (or tried to--missed rather badly) and the leader being last took us up North of Leipzig & consequently we caught a lot of flak from that area. It's the old fighter area, too, but we didn't see any thanks to a good formation. But, it was an awful lot of damn hard work keeping in formation. So after our Sqn leader called the Gp leader and gave him fixes & told him which way to turn we finally got back to the Division's line of withdrawal after collecting miraculously little flak damage considering all the guns trained on us. Had a long haul--8:15 carrying 10-500# Gps. Had to let down thru overcast from 5000 to 1500' using instrument let down procedure. Came out at 1500 west of field. Doubled back & came in on an 070° runway heading. Spotted field & made a straight in approach, but just before touching down saw a red flare go up & the tower called that our ball turret wasn't stowed. Found out later that the guns were about 6 inches off runway when I gunned it & went around! Made excellent landing--very smooth--hardly knew I was down. That was DF L Love (Lady Lois)'s 13th mission! And only two flak holes--minor. Everyone's bitching about a very screwed up & wasted mission. Found out later that there were 5000 Allied planes out today--a record!

The 91st eventually dropped on a target of opportunity, Freiberg, Germany. In spite of the confusion on the mission, all 91st Group planes returned safely. However, losses in the 1st Air

Division were especially high on this mission; a total of 20 planes went down. Cpt Jerrold L. Newquist, in No. 562, was the Group Leader for this mission. Cpt Immanuel J. Klette led the 324th Squadron.

Mission 34. The target for the 9th of October was the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt, Germany. A year earlier, this had been one the most feared targets on the continent. There had been two disastrous raids on the ball bearing factories there in 1943, 17 August and 14 October. The Eighth Air Force lost a total of 120 planes on these two missions. The 91st was the Lead Group on both missions. The 91st lost 10 aircraft on 17 August and one on 14 October. For today, however, it was just a typically long mission deep into Germany. Bill and his crew were again in "Lady Lois" Leading the Third Element of the Low Squadron.

Oct 9th

34th mission. Eeyow--nearly finished! Had a beautiful mission today--excellent formation & easy to fly. Flew the same old spot--lead of 3rd element with good old Lady Lois. Went to Schweinfurt to hit ball bearing plant or city if PFF. Bad weather with undercast all the way so bombed PFF. Flak was barrage type & due to our good chaff was inaccurate. However, one burst was close--hit the supercharger cooler on #3 engine just missing the vulnerable bucket wheel. Another particle just missed hitting the tire & bounce off the rim of the R wheel! I felt it hit. Had a little bad luck in getting stuck in the mud at side of taxi strip before take off. Thus, we were last ones off as we had to be pulled out by cleat truck but we were early in formation. Got 7:15 hrs today. Carried 10-500# GP's which we dropped on PFF target & I believe we had good results. Had fighters reported at Koblenz, but our formation was very good and we had good fighter support by P38's. Were briefed for 51's & 47's (5 Gps--300 planes) but somehow P38's got there too--more the merrier. Major Klette (just got his majority today) squadron CO complimented us again on our lead of # 3. We were good if I do say so myself. 3 of our first pilots finished up today & I finish next mission. That leaves the squadron with few experienced pilots & big shortage of copilots--don't know whether John will fly 1st pilot or not on the last two. Had to let down thru overcast from 5000 to 1200'--same on take off--but vis was good under clouds. Lady Lois had to have a whole new rudder after our last mission. I have the flak that ruined the old one.

Although "Lady Lois" received major flak damage over the target, no planes were lost from the 1st Air Division the 9th.

Mission 35. For his final mission, Bill was in his "Lady Lois". The ground crew for "Lady Lois", Luther Heimbaugh (Crew Chief), Alvin Robbins, Charles Blauser, and William Moore had done an

excellent job of getting her repaired in time for this mission. 1Lt Robert R. Hunt was bombardier in place of Lt Swindell for Bill's last mission, as he flew the usual Lead of the Third Element, this time in the Lead Squadron.

--FINISH--
October 15th

Am tired but happy tonight. Flew my 35th mission today & now I'm all finished up! We went to Cologne at 27,000' & bombed PFF thru just about the worst flak yet. Flew Lady Lois of course--6:00 hop with 14-250# GP & 2-500 incendiaries or 4500#. Lead 3rd element again. Had easy climb to target area, but as we started to turn on IP flak started to come up. It was very, very accurate despite total lack of visibility on the part of the ground crews (maybe that's the new secret weapon Germany has promised us for Oct 15). Just as we neared the target my two wing men disappeared. Capt Tufty on right wing was hit bad & fire in no. 4 eng. He called his crew to be prepared to bail out, but four of his crew bailed out over the target!! He meanwhile told his copilot to feather #4, but copilot got rattled and feathered two of the wrong engines. Anyway they had quite a time of it and finally got back & landed in South England. The other wing man got hit pretty bad & he came home alone too. McDowell in the 4th element got a direct hit just aft of the ball turret that very nearly cut the ship in two. The ball turret op was jammed in the turret & they couldn't get him out. He was cut up but miraculously not seriously injured but nearly froze to death riding all the way back to base in the blown open turret. The waist gunner had his foot cut off across the arch. Pilot did not have full control of the plane but did a wonderful job of bringing it back. Some of the control cables were shot out & AFCE was out. Believe he'll get the Silver Star for his excellent job. Capt W. W. Thompson (Avon Park) got hit pretty badly. One piece coming thru the radio room killed the radio operator instantly, flak hitting him in the thigh & going up through his body to his heart. He was T/Sgt March of the 322nd Sqn. 8 men were wounded today & 1 killed. All ships came back but that is a miracle. Two made forced landing on the south coast. We got about 20 hits in Lady Lois but none very serious. A Tokyo tank was punctured & an oil line in #3 eng was cut. Had 3 holes in Plexiglas nose, one big one in radio room and a big one under the navigator that hit and

demolished the relief can there. One came thru the right waist window and hit the waist gunner in the back--on the flak suit--no damage. Lyons finished today too. He & I started together the same day July 6th & finished the same day Oct 15th. Flip didn't fly today as we had to have a lead bombardier 'cause if visual we were going to bomb by 6 ship Sqns & I'd led one. I have flown a total of 262:40 combat time.

A rather wild and dramatic finish to Bill's combat career. However, a safe return for him and his crew. For an account of this mission and Lt McDowell's return in No. 770, "Little Miss Mischief" see page 7. 1Lt Joseph R. Lyons, a copilot in the 401st Squadron, had trained with Bill at Avon Park. Lt Henderson flew as first pilot with the rest of Bill's crew for their remaining two missions.

Bill had lead a charmed life as a first pilot. Although the plane in which he was flying received flak damage on almost every mission, major damage on five of them, not a single crewman flying with Bill was wounded. During his 102 days at Bassingbourn, the 91st Group had 25 planes shot down, with 103 crewmen killed in action and 131 becoming POWs. Of the ten planes in which he flew, only "Zootie Cutie" and "Lady Lois" survived the war. Five of the planes eventually were shot down, one crashed on a training flight and two were salvaged after crash-landing because of severe battle damage; 33 crewmen in these planes were killed, 18 became POWs. "Lady Lois" went on to fly a total of 74 combat missions (see her story, beginning on page 1).

Bill returned to the States in October 1944. After a 30-day leave, he was assigned to Sebring, Florida. His wife, and daughter, Lois Anne, accompanied him to Florida. He was then sent to Denver, Colorado to attend a bombsight school for three months. Soon after returning to Sebring, Bill was discharged. Bill and family returned to Orchard Park where he ran the family business until retiring in 1990. Bill retained his pilot's license, but flew only for pleasure.

Bill passed away the 23rd of March 1999. His wife Lois, "Lady Lois", now resides in a retirement home in Williamsville, New York.

-- FINISH --

October 15th

Am tired but happy tonight - flew my 35th mission today & now I'm all finished up! We went to Cologne at 17,000' & bombed PFF there just about the worst flak yet. 5th Lady Ldn. of course - 6:00 hrs with 14-2500 lbs & 2-500 incendiaries at 4500 ft. Had 3rd element again. Had easy climb to target area but as we started to leave our I.P. flak started to come up - it was

very very accurate despite total lack of visibility on the part of the ground crew (maybe that's the new secret weapon Germany promised us for Oct 15) just as we reached the target my two wing men disappeared - Capt Tufty on right wing was hit dead & fell in no 4 wing. He called his crew to be prepared to bail out - but four of the crew bailed out over the target!! He himself meanwhile told his copilot to feather "X" but copilot got rattled

and feathered two of the wing engines - anyway they had quite a time of it and finally got back & landed in South England. The other wing man got hit pretty bad & he came home alone too. When Russell in the 4th element got a drink his pilot got the ball turret shot very nearly out the ship in two. The ball turret was jammed in his turret & they couldn't get him out. He was cut up but screaming not seriously injured but he nearly hope led to death.

riding all the way back to base in his plane open turret. The waist gunner had his foot cut off. When the arch. Pilot did not have full control of the plane but did a wonderful job of bringing it back & some of the control cables were shot out & PFFG was out. Believe he'll get the Silver Star for his excellent job.

Capt W.A. Thompson (Room Park) got hit pretty bad by one piece coming through the radio room killed the radio operator instantly - flak hitting

him in the thigh & going up through his body to his heart. He was T/SGT March of the 322nd Ldn. B. men were wounded today & 1 killed. All ships came back but that is a miracle - two made forced landings on the south coast. We got about 20 hits in Lady Ldn but were very accurate. A telegraph tank was knocked out practically & our oil line in "I" wing was cut. Had 3 holes in ship's glass - nose one big one in radio room & a big one under the navigator.

that hit & demolished the relief car there. One came through the night watch window & hit the waist gunner in the back - on the flak suit - no damage.

Sydney finished today too - he & I started together the same day July 6th & finished the same day Oct 15th.

Ship didn't fly today so we had to have a lead bombardier. Even if missed we were going to bomb by 6 ship zone & I'd lead one.

I have flown a total of 262:40 combat time.

Last entry in Capt William H. Arthur's combat diary, written the evening he returned from his 35th and final mission. (Bill Arthur)

Forty Seconds Over Eisenach

The Return

The usual anxious apprehension is building within the scattered groups of ground crewmen aimlessly milling about the hangers of the 91st Bomb Group (Heavy) at Bassingbourn this clear Wednesday afternoon. Other men slowing are collecting around their assigned emergency vehicles, including the olive-drab ambulances with their fiery crosses of red in squares of white. It is a little after 1330 hours Double British Summer Time, 16 August 1944. The Group has a mission out over Germany. The bombers have been away from base for seven and one half hours. Returning planes should be coming into view any minute now.

Although ground crews typically "sweat out" arrival of their aircraft, there is no exceptional concern today. It has been almost a month since the Group has experienced serious losses on a mission. Back on the 20th of July, the 91st lost eight B-17s on a mission to Leipzig, seven to German fighters, one to flak. Since then the Group has flown 18 missions with a total loss of four aircraft, all to flak. Only a few German fighters now dare come up at the formations and these are dispersed easily by American fighter escorts.

Accordingly, the ground crews are not anticipating that their aircraft would be subject to unusual risk on today's mission. This, in spite of the fact that the primary target was the Siebel aircraft factories at Halle, Germany, 20 miles northwest of Leipzig. The Leipzig area is infamous for its flak and fighter defenses, as the 91st discovered the hard way on the 20th of July. The Strike Force would have been well within the Leipzig Luftwaffe air defense coverage. Still, two recent missions to the synthetic oil plants at Merseburg, also in the Leipzig area, on the 28th and 29th of July did not incur losses.

The officers on the balcony of the control tower train their binoculars to the northeast. Several small black specks appear high up in the sky. Faint rumbling as from distant thunder begins to pulsate through the air. The specks slowly take on the familiar silhouettes of B-17 Flying Fortresses. The muffled reverberations increase to an undulating roar. The formation is rather ragged as the planes begin to orchestrate their landing promenade. Streaming red flares arc from one aircraft. Wounded are aboard. The pilot is requesting priority in landing. The bomber breaks out of the pattern, peels off and touches down at 1344 hours on the long No. 25 runway. Flaps down, the plane moves off the runway and shudders to a halt on the grass. An ambulance rushes alongside the fuselage. Two crewmen are lifted carefully through the waist door and quickly put aboard the ambulance, which

speeds off to the base hospital. The remaining aircraft resume their pirouetting ballet, three bombers peel off and, one at a time, come in for a landing on each turn of the downward dance.

The tires of the next plane send up puffs of black smoke from the macadam runway at 1357 hours. Others continue landing at less than one minute intervals. A late arriving B-17 fires off a red flare. It, too, has a wounded crewman aboard. The circular aerial drill is interrupted as the plane slips directly into the landing pattern and touches down at 1415 hours. Another ambulance chases the bomber down the runway to where it pulls off and stops. The injured airman is placed in the ambulance and rushed on his way to the hospital. The landing cycle continues.

Planes from the three Squadrons flying on today's mission, the 323rd, 324th and 401st, are intermixed as they land and taxi to their respective dispersal points. One-by-one the hardstands of 323rd and 401st Squadrons fill. Eventually, all are occupied by their resident aircraft. Flight crews disembark and ground crews begin the cleaning up procedures. When the last plane touches down at 1422 hours and taxis to her hardstand in the 323rd area, there are still seven empty spaces in the 324th Squadron dispersal area. The 324th ground crews continue looking to the sky. Only deafening silence--no sign of approaching aircraft. It finally sinks in. The Group has returned. Seven of the twelve 324th planes that went over the continent this morning (another had aborted back to base while still over England) are missing, a 58% loss. There is a look of disbelief on the faces of the ground crews. How could so many planes be missing, all from the same squadron? Returning flight crews are equally grim-faced as they silently and hastily board jeeps and trucks to head for debriefing. The orphaned ground crews will have to wait an explanation as to the fate of their charges.

The Preparation

Field Order No. 473, outlining today's mission to Halle arrived at Group Headquarters at 2345 hours last evening. The complex details of carrying out the mission began immediately. Ground crews were at their stations within a few minutes, preparing the bombers and running up the engines. Gas tanks were filled as the armorers loaded the planes with .50 caliber machine gun belts. Others brought the bombs, 1,000 pound M-44 general purpose bombs, five of each which were loaded onto the planes of the Lead Squadron. Ten, each, 500 pound M-17 incendiaries were placed

aboard the High and Low Squadrons. Two aircraft of the High Squadron were loaded with "Nickels", propaganda leaflets. The flight crews were awakened at 0215 hours for breakfast at 0300 hours and briefing at 0345. The crews were at stations (at their planes) at 0430 hours. After going through preflight checks and topping off the gas tanks, engines were started at 0530. The planes began taxiing at 0540 hours.

For today's mission the 323rd was the Lead Squadron. LTC James F. Berry, flying as copilot with 1Lt Rexford T. Boggs' crew in No. 632, was the Group Leader. The 324th Squadron was assigned the High Squadron, the 401st the Low Squadron.

Thirteen planes were put up by the 324th Squadron today.

Lead Element

Lead and Squadron Lead, No. 890, "Fearless Fosdick"; 1Lt Robert N. Crans, pilot. As Squadron Lead, Lt Crans had experienced crewmen aboard today, all with more than 15 missions to their credit.

No. 2 position, No. 515, "The Wild Hare"; 2Lt Edward L. Witty. Lt Witty was the regular copilot on Lt Crans' crew. He had flown 13 prior missions, all as copilot. This was his first mission in the left seat, as command pilot. The remainder of the crewmen were the crew of 2Lt Elbert W. Weeks, who was in the copilot's seat today to gain combat experience before taking his own crew out. Lt Weeks and his crew arrived at Bassingbourn the 4th of August. All, including Lt Weeks, were on their first combat mission. Lt Week's regular copilot, 2Lt Gilbert B. Willis, was stood down today. Lt Willis will be killed while flying with Lt Weeks on 8 September.

No. 3 position, No. 000; 2Lt Reese W. Lindsay, Jr. Lt Lindsay, had flown 20 previous missions as copilot, all of them on 2Lt John L. Leslie's crew. This is Lt Lindsay's first mission as a command pilot. The copilot, 2Lt Albert J. Perry, also a first pilot, is on his fourth combat familiarization mission. Six of the other seven crewmen are members of Lt. Perry's crew. This is their first combat mission. The crew arrived at Bassingbourn the 6th of August. Lt Perry's copilot, 2Lt John E. Savage, is flying as copilot with Lt Leslie's crew in the Second Element.

Lt Perry's original crew consisted of 10 crewmen, including two waist gunners, Sgts Cleo H. Gates and Lewis C. Morgan. Since air crews now include only one waist gunner because of the decreased risk of encounters with German fighters, one waist gunner needed to be removed from the crew. There was also a disagreement between Lts Perry and Lindsay as to whether Lt Perry's tail gunner, Sgt Leland K. Herron, should fly the mission. Finally, Sgt Morgan told the pilots he

would take the tail position. He actually felt more comfortable knowing he had twin .50 caliber machine guns, as in the tail, rather than the single machine gun used by the waist gunners. He moved to the tail and Sgt Gates remained in the waist. This decision was to save Sgt Morgan's life. Sgt Herron was stood down for this mission. Sgt Herron will be killed in action the 30th of November while flying as tail gunner on a mission to Zeitz with 2Lt Ralph E. Stolz's crew in No. 742, "Pam."

Lt Lindsay's crew was scheduled to fly in No. 205, "The Ruptured Duck." The bomb load placed aboard "The Ruptured Duck" during the night was discovered to be incorrect when checked by the bombardier prior to starting engines. The crew switched to a Spare, No. 000, provided by the 322nd Squadron for the mission.

Second Element

Element Lead and Deputy Squadron Lead, No. 126; 2Lt John ("Jack") L. Leslie. Except for the copilot, Lt Savage, who was flying his first combat mission, this was an experienced crew. Lt Leslie had flown 22 previous missions, 21 of them as a first pilot. The bombardier, F/O Earl W. Donley, was on his sixteenth mission. The rest of the crew had flown at least 20 previous combat missions. The flight engineer, T/Sgt Joseph H. Godfrey, and the radio operator, T/Sgt James I. Middleton, had been promoted from S/Sgt yesterday. Lt Leslie and his crew were listed to fly on No. 033, "My Baby", but the smoke marker/streamer bomb had not been placed in the bomb bay. Since they were Deputy Squadron lead, the crew had to switch to another Spare from the 322nd Squadron, No. 126, which had a smoke marker/streamer aboard.

No. 2, No. 613; F/O Louis C. Marpil. F/O Marpil was another copilot flying as a first pilot on this mission. He had flown 20 previous missions, most of them as a copilot with 2Lt Joe Bressol's crew. This was his fourth mission as aircraft commander. Seven of the crew for today were originally in the crew of 2Lt George B. Gaines. Following their arrival at Bassingbourn on 17 July, Lt Gaines flew a number of practice missions with his crew over England. During this time he developed a cold. The Squadron CO insisted that he continue to fly practice missions. On one of the practice missions Lt Gaines' ear drum ruptured. He was stood down from flying while the ear drum healed. Lt Gaines was assigned Assistant Operations Officer for the 324th Squadron. After his ear drum healed, he began flying again, usually as Squadron Lead. Lt Gaines continued as Assistant Operations Officer and flying combat missions through the end of the war. The rest of Lt Gaines' crew was placed on flight status and started flying missions separately as fill-ins on a number of other crews. Yesterday, the seven

crewmembers flew together with F/O Marpil. All seven are back with him again today.

Most of F/O Marpil's crewmembers had flown at least three previous missions. The waist gunner, Sgt Clayton O. Tyson, was on his third mission. Both the ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Truely S. Ponder, and the tail gunner, Sgt Clem J. Pine, were on their second combat tours. Sgt Ponder had flown 25 missions with the 303rd Bomb Group, returning to the States in January 1944. Sgt Pine flew 25 missions with the 351st Bomb Group, also finishing in January 1944. Sgts Ponder and Pine originally had trained together in gunnery school. After completing their first combat tours, they ended up together again as instructors at Galveston Air Force Base in Texas. In July they volunteered for a second combat tour. This time they were assigned to Lt Gaines' crew in advanced training, eventually ending up at Bassingbourn. This was their fourth mission with the 91st Group.

No. 613 carried only "Nickels" (propaganda leaflets) today, five XG 19 and five XG 20 containers.

No. 3, No. 085, "Yankee Belle"; 1Lt John R. McCombs. This was another experienced crew. Lt McCombs had flown 17 previous missions, all but one as a first pilot. The remainder of the crew had flown at least 15 combat missions.

A Spare, flying in the rear or "diamond" position, No. 634, "Texas Chubby-The J'ville Jolter"; 2Lt Halsted Sherrill. No. 634 was a 322nd Squadron aircraft on loan to the 324th for this mission. Lt Sherrill was on his 19th mission. He had flown his first eight missions as a copilot with a number of different crews. Lt Sherrill was assigned his own crew on 28 July and had flown 10 missions as a first pilot. The ball turret gunner, Sgt Enrique T. Perez and the waist gunner, Sgt Joseph R. Morrison, were filling in for Sgts Joseph E. Radecki and Woodrow R. Cornett of Lt Sherrill's regular crew. The latter two crewmembers were recuperating from wounds received yesterday on the mission to Ostheim. Sgt Perez was on his 25th mission and Sgt Morrison, his 23rd. The remainder of the crew had flown at least eleven missions. Sgt Cornett will be killed when his flak-damaged plane, No. 988, "The B.T.O.", crash-lands at Brussels-Evere Airfield while returning from another mission to Ostheim on 10 January 1945.

The navigator on today's crew, 2Lt William M. Porter, had been navigator on 1Lt Richard W. Burch's crew. Lt Burch and his crew arrived at Bassingbourn on the 7th of April. Almost as soon as they arrived, Lt Porter came down with a bad cold, accompanied by fits of coughing. Unable to shake the cold or cough, Lt Porter went on sick call. During the examination, the doctor discovered that as a result of his coughing, Lt Porter had developed a hernia that required surgery. He was operated on immediately and stood down from flying while

recovering. In the meantime, Lt Burch's crew began flying combat missions, with different navigators filling in for Lt Porter.

On their 12th mission, on 20 June, Lt Burch's plane, No. 892, was hit by flak over Hamburg, exploding in midair. Only the tail gunner, Pvt Joseph A. Evers, escaped to become a POW. But for a simple cold and resulting complications, Lt Porter would have been aboard No. 892. Thus, the difference between death and life. But for Lt Porter's cold, Cpt Harold I. Fox, the navigator on the 20th of June, would not have been aboard No. 892. The difference between life and death. Lt Porter returned to flight status the 20th of July and flew three missions as a fill-in. On the 28th he was assigned to Lt Sherrill's crew. Today was his 12th mission.

Third Element

Lead, No. 012; 2Lt Vincent A. Fonke. Lt Fonke was on his eleventh mission, all but one as first pilot. The rest of the crew had flown between six and ten previous missions.

No. 2, No. 088, "Redwing", on loan from the 322nd Squadron for this mission; 2Lt Royal E. Manville. Lt Manville had flown seven prior missions, four as a first pilot. The remainder of his crew had flown at least three combat missions. The navigator, 2Lt James Swaye, originally had been a bombardier on 2Lt Arthur L. Stevens' crew that arrived at Bassingbourn mid June. At that time the 8th Air Force was short of navigators. Lt Swaye was replaced by 2Lt Thomas J. Scheurell on Lt Stevens' crew and sent to navigator's school in England. On 1 August, Lt Stevens and his crew, while flying in No. 879, were shot down by flak on the bomb run to the target at Chartres, France. The plane exploded in mid-air. Only the tail gunner, Sgt Lawrence E. Doyle, of the nine man crew survived. When finished with navigator's school, Lt Swaye was assigned as navigator on Lt Manville's crew.

No. 3, No. 673, "Lassie Come Home", another "loaner" from the 322nd; 2Lt Leonard F. Figie. Lt Figie's crew had flown six different aircraft the previous nine missions. The plane they flew yesterday, No. 151, "Shure Shot", was badly damaged by flak and unable to fly today. Lt Figie's crew had flown 12 previous missions. Except for the waist gunner, S/Sgt Walter Salo, and the toggler, S/Sgt Harlon B. Williams, this was Lt Figie's regular crew. Sgt Salo was a member of 1Lt Joe Bilotta's crew. Lt Bilotta already had finished his 35 missions. The remainder of his crew were scattered to other crews to finish up their required missions. This was Sgt Salo's 34th mission. Sgt Morris M. Holmstad was Lt Figie's regular waist gunner. He was stood down today that Sgt Salo might work towards his quota of 35 missions. A different

bombardier/toggler has flown with Lt Figie on most of his missions. Today, Sgt Williams was flying as his togglier. Sgt Williams had been shot down earlier over France and had evaded capture, eventually making his way back to England. On another mission, Sgt Williams' plane had been forced down in the Channel. The crew was picked up by an Air Sea Rescue boat and returned to Bassingbourn. Sgt Williams was flying his 25th mission.

"Lassie Come Home" is carrying only Nickels, five USG-48 and five XG-16 containers.

Fourth Element

Lead, No. 128, "Dear Becky"; 1Lt Freeman C. Beasley. "Dear Becky" was named after Lt Beasley's wife, Becky. His was another experienced crew. Lt Beasley had flown 19 prior missions, all but one as a first pilot. The crew today had flown with Lt Beasley on most of his missions. Lt Beasley will be severely wounded in the head by shrapnel while flying "Dear Becky" to Ludvigshaven on 8 September and will not fly again.

No. 2, No. 333, "Wee Willie", also on loan from the 322nd Squadron; 2Lt Lawrence N. Gaddis. Lt Gaddis had flown eight prior missions, six as a first pilot. The copilot, 2Lt Albert Raisin, arrived at Bassingbourn sometime earlier as a casual officer, rather than with a crew. He had been assigned to fly as tail gunner and formation coordinator on the Group Lead plane for five missions. This was his first mission as a copilot. The rest of Lt Gaddis' crew had flown at least five combat missions.

No. 3, No. 996, "Boston Bombshell", yet another plane on loan from the 322nd Squadron, the second plane from the 322nd to bear this name (the first, No. 898 was lost 22 February 1944 on a mission to Oschersleben); 2Lt John F. Dunlap, pilot. Lt Dunlap was flying his 19th combat mission, his first in the left seat. He had flown his 18 previous missions in the right seat, as copilot, on 1Lt William J. O'Brien's crew. Except for the navigator, the rest of the men aboard were members of F/O John R. Lindahl's crew, flying their first combat mission. This crew arrived at Bassingbourn the 6th of August. F/O Lindahl had flown one combat mission as copilot with Lt Sherrill's crew on the 11th. F/O Lindahl was ill today and in the hospital. His crew was not on the original alert list for the mission.

Since F/O Lindahl's crew had not yet been placed on combat alert, the navigator, 2Lt Adam Arakas, was given a pass to go into nearby Cambridge last evening. F/O Lindahl's bombardier, 2Lt Joseph G. Weinstock, had been sent to London yesterday to have a pair of flight goggles made. After Lts Arakas and Weinstock had left base a shortage of crews necessitated use of F/O Lindahl's crew for the mission. Lt Arakas became lost in the

black-out and could not locate the bus station in time to go back to Bassingbourn last evening. He had to wait and take the train back this morning. Lt Weinstock's goggles were not ready until too late to return to base last evening. Both arrived back at Bassingbourn after the aircraft had departed for Halle.

2Lt Hubert B. Carpenter, the bombardier on Lt Crans' crew, who was also qualified as a navigator, was assigned to "Boston Bombshell" to fill in for Lt Arakas. This was Lt Carpenter's eighth combat mission, his first as a navigator. There were two waist gunners on F/O Lindahl's crew. Since only one waist gunner was needed, one, Sgt Leslie D. Algee, filled in as togglier in place of Lt Weinstock. Sgt John W. Barclay remained as the sole waist gunner. No. 027, "Hikin' for Home" was originally assigned to Lt Dunlap's crew for today's mission. However, the correct bomb load had not been placed in the plane and the crew switched to "Boston Bombshell".

The Mission

The Group aircraft moved out of their hardstands onto the taxiways at 0540 hours. The Group Lead bomber, No. 632, left the runway at 0545, with No. 890, Lead of the 324th, lifting off at 0546 hours. The Squadrons began forming up over the base. While trying to form up, Lt Manville became lost in the East Anglian overcast and could not find the 91st formation. Eventually he saw the 457th Bomb Group, of the 94th Combat Wing, from nearby Glatton Airbase, coming together for a mission to the Ju 88 fighter aircraft assembly plant at Schkeuditz, near Leipzig. Following standard operational procedures ("SOP"), Lt Manville formed up with the 457th rather than abort the mission. He moved "Red Wing" into the "diamond position" of the Number Four Element of the "Low Box" (as the 457th Group called the "Low Squadron" position in its formation) and flew on to Schkeuditz. The Low Box was led by Cpt Joseph F. Reilly.

Lt Sherrill, flying as the "Spare" with the Second Element, saw that Lt Manville's space was not occupied. He moved his aircraft over into the No. 2 position of the Fourth Element to continue the mission. Shortly afterwards, Lt Gaddis, in "Wee Willie", became ill and had to return to the base, touching down at 0810 hours, an hour and fifty minutes after taking off. The No. 2 position in the Fourth Element remained vacant.

The rest of the 91st planes finished forming up and the Group left the airbase at 0742 hours. It joined up with the 398th and 381st Groups to complete the 1st Combat Wing. The remaining Groups formed into three Combat Wings, the 41st, 40th and 94th. The 41st was the Lead Wing, followed by the 1st, 40th, and 94th, in that order. The 398th

Group led the 1st Wing, with the 381st and 91st following. The Wings came together as the bomber stream left the English coast a few miles south of Ipswich. The bombers headed out over the North Sea on a northeasterly course, crossing the Dutch coast 20 miles north of Amsterdam. The Strike Force then turned straight east for 125 miles, flying over the Zuider Zee, the rest of Holland and on into Germany to 25 miles northwest of Osnabruck. There the bomber stream made two “dog legs” to the southeast skirting to the east of Osnabruck. During this time the bombers gradually climbed to the briefed bombing altitude of 25,000 feet.

At 1002 hours, in the vicinity of Eisenach, an hour and eight minutes from the target, the P-51 fighter group escorting the 91st Group up to this point turned back. The fighter group that was to take over escorting the bombers on to the target had not yet appeared on the scene, leaving the 91st without fighter escort.

For most of the mission the 324th Squadron had been running into heavy prop wash from the 381st Group flying directly in front of the 91st. The planes were buffeted around in the sky. The pilots were unable to hold their positions in the formation. The Squadron began to loosen up and fall behind. Some of the pilots wanted to drop below the turbulence, but this was not possible if Group integrity was to be maintained.

As the bombers approached Eisenach, flak bursts began appearing near the Lead plane of the 324th High Squadron. According to the flak chart Lt Crans had taped to his leg there should not have been flak batteries in this area. As he glanced down at the map to confirm the location, Lt Crans called to his navigator, 2Lt Carl R. Phifer, over the intercom and asked where the flak was coming from. At the same time Lt Phifer yelled--“Lead, Lead!” Lt Crans looked up and saw that Lt Boggs’ Group Lead aircraft was making a turn to the left. Lt Crans started chasing him, with the rest of the High Squadron attempting to follow. The 324th was on the outside of the turn and had a longer route to fly. In addition, the planes were continuing to encounter heavy prop wash. The combined effect prevented the High Squadron from keeping up with the rest of the Group during the turn. The Squadron dropped about one minute behind the Group formation.

Prior to the turn, some of the crewmen had observed a “gaggle” of German fighters, mostly new Model “D” long-nosed FW 190s, along with a few Me 109s, drifting back down alongside the bomber stream. The fighters appeared to be looking over the formations for a vulnerable Group to attack. The Germans soon disappeared beyond the rear of the 91st formation. Shortly thereafter the 324th Squadron tail gunners saw what they at first took to be the over-due American fighter escort approaching from

out of the sun at 0600 O’clock level. It was immediately obvious, however, the German fighters were coming back at them.

Part of the enemy fighters were from Sturmstaffel (Assault Squadron) IV of Jagdgeschwader (JG) 3 stationed at an air base at Schongau. The Sturmstaffel had taken off midmorning and soon had the American Strike Force in sight. As they moved down alongside the bomber stream, the pilots saw there was no fighter escort with the 91st and noticed the High Squadron was lagging behind the rest of the Group. The fighters swung around and started their runs from out of the sun and from the rear.

While still out of range of the bomber’s machine guns, the fighters began lobbing 20 and 30 mm cannon shells with timed fuses into the 324th formation. Puffs of grayish white smoke from exploding shells suddenly appeared within the formation and shells began hitting the aircraft. The fighters caught up with the bombers and in flights of two, three and five abreast, barreled right into the 324th Squadron. A few of the fighters came in close up to and under the bombers. It appeared to the bomber crewmen the fighter pilots were setting their flaps briefly and “walking their rudders” (swinging the wings from side to side) while spraying cannon and machine gun fire into the underside of the bombers. It also seemed that just before stalling out, the fighter pilots throttled forward and went on through the formation, rolling over and downward through the Lead and Low Squadrons, firing wildly as they went.

The attacks were not as they seemed, however. The German pilots were understandably scared at coming in on a bomber formation with all the defensive guns. The “winking” of the gun nozzles on the bombers and the tracers arcing towards their aircraft made it clear to the pilots they were only seconds away from being dead. There was also the fear that the American fighter escorts would come swooping down on them. The pilots simply “hunkered” down behind their engines for protection and kept the throttle full forward as they charged into the formation. The American crewmen saw the fighters slamming into the prop wash of the bomber they were attacking, causing the fighters to slow down suddenly. The buffeting of the fighters in the prop wash gave the impression the pilots were “walking the rudder.” Younger, less experienced, pilots had particular trouble in holding their aircraft stable. As soon as they felt their fighter slowed by the prop wash, the German pilots nosed over, continuing at full throttle as they dropped through the lower Squadrons. The fighters kept on going--only one pass was made through the 91st formation. That one pass was disastrous.

Forty Seconds of Terror

The following records the estimated forty seconds it took for the German fighters to charge through the 324th Squadron formation. This was without doubt the longest 40 seconds experienced by the planes and crews of the 91st Bomb Group during the air war over Europe.

Lead Element

No. 890, "Fearless Fosdick"

The tail gunner, S/Sgt Patrick J. Walsh, saw German fighters coming in five abreast and fired at them so long he burned out his guns. The flight engineer, S/Sgt Russell W. Wilson, was able to fire off a few rounds at fighters attacking the higher, No. 2 Element before they broke down and under "Fearless Fosdick." He did not see any hits. The radio operator, S/Sgt John B. Ackerson, also fired off a few ineffective rounds from his radio compartment gun at the downward fleeing fighters. Some of the fighters were giving off black smoke as they dived downward, suggesting they were on fire. It was discovered much later when interviewing former Luftwaffe pilots that such smoke was merely from the exhaust of the fighters as they throttled forward, not from fire within the aircraft.

No. 515, "The Wild Hare"

A FW 190 came in on "The Wild Hare", spraying her with 20 mm cannon shells. Hits on the tail riddled the rudder fabric. A piece of tail fabric began flapping over the windows of the tail gunner, Sgt Joseph M. Albury. Sgt Albury reached out and tore away the canvas so he could see. By this time, the fighters were gone. Sgt Benjamin B. Benigno in the ball turret had seen the fighters coming in and was able to get off a few bursts. Even though he tried to hold his bursts short, as trained to do, Sgt. Benigno got swept up in the excitement and fired longer than he should. Fortunately, the overheated guns were not needed again on the mission.

No. 000

A FW-190 came directly in on the tail of No. 000. The Tail gunner, Sgt. Lewis C. Morgan, fired at the fighter causing it to flare up and away with its belly towards Sgt Morgan's position. Sgt Morgan put a few rounds into the plane, but it rolled over and went on down through the formation.

No. 000 was raked by cannon fire all along the right wing from the tip to up next to the fuselage. The gas tank between the No. 3 and 4 engines caught fire, sending flames streaming 30 feet to the rear. No. 000 pulled up almost vertically and exploded about four seconds later. Only the tail section remained intact, slowly floating downward in a flat spin. The rest of the plane simply

disintegrated into an orange and black cloud, spewing fragments of No. 000 over the sky. Sgt Morgan tried to go out through the opening where the tail was cut off, but became entangled in the shredded metal. He finally pulled free, kicked the tail hatch open and dropped out. By this time Sgt Morgan was only 600 feet above the ground. He pulled the rip cord and the chute opened. Sgt Morgan made two swings and hit the ground hard, breaking his left heel and leg. An old man gathering vegetables put Sgt Morgan in a cart and took him to a near-by town and to a place where there were Catholic Nuns. The Nuns bandaged his leg. The next day the military arrived and put him on a train. It was three weeks before Sgt Morgan was taken to a hospital and his broken leg set.

The remaining eight crew members were killed when No. 000 exploded.

Second Element

No. 126

The tail gunner, S/Sgt Louis Kos, called in a warning of fighters approaching from the rear. A few seconds later No. 126 took several cannon hits, setting the No. 4 engine on fire and starting a fire in the bomb bay. The waist gunner, S/Sgt Douglas Buntin, was badly wounded in the chest and face by cannon shells exploding inside the fuselage. Sgt Kos was also hit by cannon fire that tore a gaping wound in his chest and injured his face. Lt. Leslie called over the intercom for the radioman, T/Sgt James I. Middleton, to get back in the waist and man a gun. By the time he unhooked his oxygen system, plugged in a "walk-around" oxygen bottle, disconnected the intercom system, and got back to a waist gun, Sgt Middleton had time to fire off only a few ineffective rounds at the fighters roaring through the formation.

No. 126 was going down. Sgt Kos attempted to crawl from his tail position back into the fuselage. Although badly wounded himself, Sgt Buntin, went back to aid Sgt Kos. Neither had on his chute. At the same time the flight engineer, T/Sgt Joseph H. Godfrey, jumped down from the top turret and went into the cockpit. Lt Leslie yelled to the copilot, 2Lt John E. Savage, "It looks bad." Lt Savage answered, "Yes." Lt Leslie ordered the crew to "Get ready to jump."

Lt Leslie told Sgt Godfrey that he was going to "ride the plane down" in an attempt to crash land since he had wounded aboard. Sgt Godfrey replied "I'm riding it down with you" (to help control the aircraft). Lt Leslie came back "No, you are not Godfrey. You are getting out." Sgt Godfrey retorted "No sir, you've been good to us and I'm riding it down with you."

The forward crewmen were putting on chutes and starting to bail out. The navigator, 2Lt

Stanley Koss, had just dropped through the nose escape hatch. Lt Leslie called the bombardier, F/O Karl W. Donley, over the intercom and told him to "Come up and get Godfrey and push him out." F/O Donley came up to the cockpit and took Sgt Godfrey down into the nose, shoved him out through the escape hatch and bailed out after him. Lt Savage followed F/O Donley to the nose and bailed out. Lt Leslie remained at the controls attempting to hold the plane level while the crew bailed out. The intercom was now out.

Almost as soon Lt Savage jumped, the plane exploded and broke in two. Sgts Buntin and Kos were still in the plane and were killed. Sgt Buntin forfeited his chance to bail out in an attempt to save Sgt Kos. Sgt Middleton, who was still in the waist of the aircraft, was knocked out by the explosion. When he regained consciousness, Sgt Middleton was floating in the air with his chute open. He landed in a field where several civilians held him until the military arrived and took him away. Lt Koss also landed safely, but was shot and killed by an elderly civilian. Lt Savage was not injured before he bailed out but he did not survive. It is not known how he died. Lt Leslie refused to bail out because he did not know if the crewmen were all out. Since the intercom was out he could not talk with them. Lt Leslie flew No. 126 until she exploded, sacrificing his life to save his crew.

Sgt Godfrey was banged up somewhat as he fell through a tree upon landing. Six or more civilians working in a nearby field came running towards him with pitchforks, apparently intent upon killing him. Before they got to him, a small girl about seven years old, stepped in front of Sgt Godfrey and held her arms out and told them to go back. They did. The girl then took Sgt Godfrey's hand and walked with him toward an approaching military patrol that took him into custody. For saving his life, Sgt Godfrey gave the little girl the only thing he had that could show his gratitude, the chewing gum in the pockets of his flight suit.

No. 613

The flight engineer, Sgt Joseph B. Nealon, saw fighters approaching the Squadron from the rear and called over the intercom "Look at the P-47s." The tail gunner, Sgt Clem J. Pine, yelled back, "Hell, those are FWs!" Almost immediately cannon fire from the German fighters started raking the plane, knocking out the No. 2 engine. The waist gunner, Sgt Clayton O. Tyson, was hit in the head and throat and killed by the first rounds slamming into the plane. The radio operator, Sgt Gerald J. Peters, was hit in the ankle and knocked to the floor of the radio room. Sgt Pine, in the tail, was firing at the on-coming fighters when a shell exploded in the

tail compartment, shredding his chute, wounding him in the left thigh and throwing him back onto the tail wheel cover. He yelled out over the intercom "My God, I've had it."

For the crewmen up in the nose compartment, the first indication of anything wrong was when the plane started shuttering all over from exploding cannon shells and the aft gunners firing their .50 caliber machine guns. The navigator, 2Lt Elliot H. Winston, started to get up to man his gun when the nose was hit. The Plexiglas above the bombardier's position blew out and several of the navigation maps were sucked up and out of the aircraft. As he looked out the side window, Lt Winston saw a German fighter hanging over the wing, so close he could see clearly the pilot's face.

No. 613 started losing altitude rapidly. The oxygen system had been punctured and drained. F/O Marpil needed to get the plane down to where the crew could breath. As the aircraft started dropping, Sgt Pine, who had seen other B-17s in the formation exploding in the air, crawled into the rear of the fuselage. There he saw Sgt Tyson sprawled on the floor obviously dead and Sgt Peters lying on the floor of his compartment with a gaping hole in his leg. Sgt Pine could not tell if he were dead or alive. When he sensed the plane was dropping rapidly and saw that the No. 2 engine was dead, Sgt Pine assumed they were going down. After having seen what had happened to so many other aircraft, he figured he had best get out while there was still time to do so. Sgt Pine snapped on the spare chest chute the crew kept by the rear escape hatch, kicked open the door and bailed out.

F/O Marpil finally leveled off No. 613 at 14,000 feet. The windmilling No. 2 engine had to be feathered. The main gas tank to No. 4 engine was hit and that engine also stopped. Sgt Nealon pumped gas into the No. 4 tank and got the engine running again, although roughly. The aircraft was still under control. F/O Marpil then went back into the fuselage to check out the damage and to give aid to Sgt Peters. At about the same time, Sgt Ponder tried to come up out of the ball turret. He had difficulty in opening the hatch since Sgt Tyson's body was lying on top of the turret. When he finally got out, Sgt Ponder saw that the back of Sgt Tyson's head had been blown off. He noticed that Sgt Pine was gone and the escape hatch open so he assumed he had jumped. He then went forward to the radio compartment and gave Sgt Peters a morphine shot and filled his ankle wound with sulfa powder. After that he went back down into the turret in case any more fighters came through after them. None did.

F/O Marpil asked Lt Winston to plot a course back to England as he turned No. 613 away from the Strike Force and headed home alone.

No. 085, "Yankee Belle"

The German fighters barreled past "Yankee Belle", firing as they went. Large puffs of whitish smoke from exploding 20 mm and 30 mm shells erupted all around the aircraft. Approximately 20 holes appeared in the aircraft and the hydraulic system was shot out. But, there was no major structural damage to the aircraft. The flight engineer, S/Sgt Donnell A. Connell, got off a few rounds at the fighters as they swept by his top turret, but he did not see any hits. The copilot, 2Lt Donald E. McKee, looked out his right window and saw a FW 190 floating off the right wing almost stalled out as he fired into Lt Leslie's plane. The FW 190 was a beautifully polished robin blue color. It was so close Lt McKee could see the red rubber oxygen mask of the pilot. The plane rolled over and went down through the lower Squadrons.

Machine gun fire from the wildly firing crewmen in the B-17s in the formation was going in all directions. A .50 caliber bullet from another bomber came up through the nose compartment, severed the intercom cord of the navigator, 2Lt Charles D. Pfleagor, went on into the pilots compartment between the pedals of the copilot and lodged in the inverter box. Lt Pfleagor could not communicate over the intercom and was concerned that one of the pilots may have been hit. He handed a note up to Lt McKee in the cockpit asking "Are you still alive?" There was blood on the note from where Lt Pfleagor had scratched himself. Lt McKee thought the navigator had been wounded. None of the crew had been hit in the fighter attack.

"Yankee Belle" remained on course and at altitude.

Third Element

No. 012

When the crew of No. 012 was training back in the States Lt Fonke had tried out all crew positions to get a feel for what the crewman in each position had to deal with. The SOP was for the ball turret gunner to leave his chute on the floor of the fuselage next to the opening of the turret. There was not enough room for a chute in the already cramped turret and, anyway, the gunner had to come up into the fuselage to bail out. When trying out the ball turret, Lt Fonke felt there was room to wedge in a chest pack chute, if fastened only by one hook. He was afraid that the gunner, Sgt Charles S. Brudo, might be blown out of the turret without having a chance to get to his chute. Lt Fonke had asked Sgt Brudo to wear his chute in the turret at all times, which he did.

On this mission, as No. 012 reached 10,000 ft when heading for the coast, Lt Fonke told the crew

over the intercom to "go onto oxygen and man your positions." In his haste to get into the turret, Sgt Brudo forgot to put on his chute. The radio operator, Sgt Wendell Meenach, saw Sgt Brudo had not put on his chute. Knowing he always did, Sgt Meenach yelled, "Charlie, your chute" and tapped his chest. Sgt Brudo reached back for the chute, went down into the ball and snapped it on.

When the guns were test fired over the Channel, Sgt Willard M. Holden, the tail gunner, reported that the left tail gun was inoperative. Over the continent Sgt Brudo noticed sparks coming from the fuse box in the ball turret. He lifted the lid and saw that a small label had fallen from the cover and was shorting out the fuses. He removed the label and test fired the guns to make certain they were still working. They were.

The first indication the cockpit crew had that they were under attack was the sudden appearance of puffs of grayish white smoke about the size of wash tubs all about the front of their plane. The crew had not seen these before, but knew they were not flak explosions. They were the 20 mm and 30 mm timed fuse cannon shells being fired into the formation. At the same time, Sgt Holden called over the intercom that fighters were coming in on the tail and that he was "firing at them." By then fighters were barreling into the formation from the rear. Sgt Holden yelled out "Shoot at him! Shoot at him!", his last words.

Almost immediately, 20 mm cannon shells started tearing apart No. 012. She was hit in the No. 2 engine, knocking it out, as well as in the right wing, between No. 3 and 4 engines and in the inboard wing tank. The right wing, along with the No. 4 engine, became engulfed in fire. Part of the elevator was shot off at the same time. Because of loss of the No. 2 engine and partial power from No. 4, combined with the reduced lift from the elevator, No. 012 nosed over and started dropping down. She hit some prop wash and made a one-turn spin. After dropping about 5,000 ft the combined efforts of Lt Fonke and the copilot, 2Lt Fred W. Van Sant, pulling back on the control columns leveled her off.

The tail gunner, Sgt Willard M. Holden, was killed by the first rounds of cannon fire that slammed into the plane. Sgt Brudo in the ball turret saw the fighters coming in from the rear and started firing at them. Cannon shells hit the turret and at the same time his guns jammed, either from the exploding cannon shells or from the previous short circuiting of the fuses. Sgt Brudo was wounded in the lower right leg, just above the ankle, in the crotch and in the left buttock. Another cannon shell hit the turret, knocking Sgt Brudo unconscious. When he came to, he saw he was floating free.

Knowing he had to get his chute open, Sgt Brudo reached for the rip cord handle, but it was not there. Then he saw that his chute had already opened on its own and he was coming down with only one hook engaged. Although he did not know how the chute opened, Sgt Brudo was free of the aircraft and in his chute. Had it not been for Lt Fonke's original request and for Sgt Meenach noticing he did not have his chute when he went into the turret, Sgt Brudo would have fallen 19,000 feet to his death. Such were the differences between dying and living.

Exploding cannon shells hit the waist guns and the gunner, Sgt William J. Weaver, in the face, knocking him down to the floor. He was blinded in both eyes and unable to get back on his feet. His intercom mike was blown off so that he could not communicate with Lt Fonke. Sgt Meenach looked out from the radio compartment and saw Sgt Weaver lying quietly on the floor, his face a mass of blood. He got on the intercom and told Lt Fonke that Sgt Weaver was dead.

Lt Fonke knew the plane was doomed. He rang the bail-out bell and yelled over the intercom for everyone to leave the ship. The top turret gunner, S/Sgt Raymond V. Prange (who had been promoted to S/Sgt the day before), navigator, 2Lt Robert W. Simcock, Jr., bombardier, 2Lt Herbert Carlson, and Lt Van Sant, in that order, left through the nose hatch. Sgt Meenach went out the waist door. As soon as he felt the crew had had time to clear the aircraft, Lt Fonke went into the nose and bailed out. Almost immediately No. 012 exploded, spewing wreckage all over the sky.

Sgt Weaver was still alive and in the plane when it blew. "It sounded like the whole world had blown up when she exploded." He was knocked unconscious as No. 012 disintegrated into bits and pieces. When he came to, he still could not see because of the blood over his eyes, but could feel that he was floating down in his opened chute. He, too, did not know how his chute opened. Lt Simcock escaped injury during the fighter attack and explosion of the aircraft, but broke his ankle upon landing. He was near Sgt Brudo in the German hospital while his ankle was healing.

No. 634, "Texas Chubby-The J'ville Jolter"

Just before the German fighters started their attack, Lt Sherrill decided to try to get out of the prop wash by moving "Texas Chubby" down into the open No. 2 position in the Fourth Element. He asked the copilot, 2Lt Frank J. Gilligan, to take the controls since the position was on his side of the plane. As they were sliding into position, Lt Gilligan noticed the upper turret of the plane they were joining up on, was firing like mad. At the same time, the tail gunner, Sgt Chester W. Mis, called up on the intercom and said "Our fighter

cover is h. . . no they're not!" It was the Germans. Then it sounded like rain on a roof as 20 mm shells began popping all over the place, throwing shards of steel into the skin of "Texas Chubby."

"Texas Chubby" was hit immediately in a number of places by cannon fire. The instrument panel was shot to pieces, the engines started running away, the controls were "not there." Lt Sherrill flipped on "George", the autopilot--nothing. Cannon shells exploded in the top turret killing the gunner, Sgt Vernon E. Bauerline, who slumped down in the turret. The ball turret took several direct 20 mm cannon hits, killing S/Sgt Enrique T. Perez, whose body remained trapped in the turret. Both legs of the waist gunner, S/Sgt Joseph R. Morrison, were blown off by exploding shells. He did not have his chute on. The radio operator, S/Sgt Richard J. Munkwitz, went back to give Sgt Morrison aid and put an emergency chute on him and help him bail out.

"Texas Chubby" pitched up and then dropped off on her right wing. As the aircraft went down, she just missed another B-17 going down with fire streaming from the engines. Lt Sherrill hit Lt Gilligan and said "Look at that poor bastard." Lt Gilligan looked out at their No. 3 engine which, too, was trailing fire behind the wing and said "Forget him, look at us." Lt Sherrill then said, "I guess it's time to go, we can't do a damn thing about it" and rang the bail-out bell.

The navigator, 2Lt William M. Porter, was hit in the head by shrapnel from the first exploding shells, filling his oxygen mask with blood. When, Lt Sherrill, rang the bail-out bell and told the crew over the intercom to "leave the plane", Lt Porter took off his face mask, buckled on his chest pack chute and started making his way to the nose escape hatch. Because of his wounds and lack of oxygen, Lt Porter became disoriented and tried to open the hatch with the regular handle, rather than the emergency handle.

In the meantime, Lt Gilligan moved down between the seats and looked forward. He saw Lt Porter fumbling at the escape hatch door. Lt Gilligan crawled forward to the door, pulled the emergency handle and Lt Porter tumbled out. The bombardier, 2Lt Nicholas J. Weber, had his chute on and was turning around to move to the escape hatch. He did not leave the aircraft.

Lt Porter landed on the side of a high garden fence and slid to the ground. Had he hit the top of the fence he most likely would have been severely injured, if not killed. An elderly couple who lived in the house came out as other civilians started running into the garden yelling "Chicago gangster" at Lt Porter. This name was given by the Germans to American bomber crewmen who were

creating so much devastation and death in the German cities. The elderly couple told the gathering crowd that Lt Porter was their prisoner and to leave him alone. The woman went to get water to wash off Lt Porter's facial wounds. Lt Porter told her not to bother. The blood had clotted and he was afraid his face would start bleeding again. The couple took care of Lt Porter until the authorities came for him. While waiting, they explained as best they could in German that they had a son who was a prisoner of war in England. He had written them to say that he had plenty of food and clothing and comfortable living conditions. Protecting Lt Porter was one way the German couple could reciprocate for the treatment their son was receiving.

Lt Gilligan had gone back to the cockpit and stooped down to retrieve his chute from between the seats. He looked up to see Lt Sherrill standing over him. Lt Sherrill said "Are you still here?" Then everything became chaos-noise, flashes, flying debris. The next thing Lt Gilligan knew it was quiet. He thought he was dead. He saw blue, green, blue, green, blue. . . . Then he realized he was alive and tumbling end over end, seeing sky, vegetation, sky, vegetation, sky. He still had his chute in his hands. He snapped it on and pulled the rip cord. As he floated down over a small village, he saw Home Guards and Hitler Youth running to where he would land in a farmer's field. He was taken prisoner and held at the farm. Sgt Munkwitz, who also had been blown free when "Texas Chubby" exploded, and Lt Porter were brought in later. All three were held at the farm until the military came to take them away.

When the order to bail out had come over the intercom, the tail gunner, Sgt Chester W. Mis, started to go back into the fuselage to bail out the side hatch. Just then "Texas Chubby" exploded, throwing Sgt Mis out of the plane. Although the front half of the plane disintegrated completely from the exploding bombs, the tail section remained intact and was floating down slowly. Sgt Mis was also floating down bumping up against the tail section. He was afraid to pull his rip cord, fearing his chute would become entangled in the tail and drag him down. Sgt Mis finally realized that if he did not do something, he was going to be killed anyway. He pushed against the floating tail section causing him to drift far enough away to open his chute safely.

"Texas Chubby" made about four spins before exploding in a fiery ball. Lts Sherrill and Weber and Sgt Morrison did not escape the plane when it exploded.

No. 673, "Lassie Come Home"

Sgt John F. Wallaszek, tail gunner, was the first crewman in "Lassie Come Home" to spot the German fighters coming at the formation from the

rear. Their cannons were blinking as the aircraft lobbed timed shells into the formation. At about the same time, the ball turret gunner, Sgt Frederick D. Baldwin, warned Sgt Wallaszek that fighters were coming at him. Almost immediately the tail position was hit by cannon shells, wounding Sgt Wallaszek over the right eye and throwing him back into the fuselage. As he tried to crawl back into his position, the next flight of fighters fired into the tail wounding him in the left leg. Sgt Wallaszek saw the interior of "Lassie Come Home" was a fiery inferno and knew it was time to get out. Although blinded by blood flowing down over his eyes, Sgt Wallaszek made it to the escape hatch under the tail and bailed out. Sgt Wallaszek was shot and wounded again in the right arm by angry civilians while coming down, but landed without further injury.

The first pass of the fighters created havoc within "Lassie Come Home." The ball turret gunner, Sgt Frederick D. Baldwin, radio operator, Sgt Edmund J. Mikolaitis, and copilot, 2Lt Dale W. Whitson, were all killed by 20 mm cannon shells exploding in the plane. Sgt Baldwin was partially blown from the turret by a 20 mm cannon shell. His body was hanging half out, flopping in the wind. Lt Whitson's body was thrown forward onto the control column by the force of the shells hitting him in the back. Sgt Mikolaitis was lying on the floor near the radio compartment which was a blazing caldron of fire from burning oxygen. The exploding shells engulfed the interior of the plane in flames and set the left wing of "Lassie Come Home" afire.

The waist gunner, S/Sgt Walter Salo, was hit by exploding shrapnel from the 20 mm cannon shells. At the same time he saw that the ball turret was no longer turning and that the Sgt Mikolaitis was dead. He looked back towards the tail just in time to see Sgt Wallaszek bail out through the tail hatch. Upon seeing the left wing on fire and the fire in the radio room, Sgt Salo moved to the waist escape hatch, snapped on his chest pack chute, pushed open the door and tumbled out.

In the nose, the togglier, Sgt Harlon B. Williams, saw a fighter going by the plane. Sgt Williams grabbed the right nose machine gun and fired at the attacking aircraft, which exploded in front of "Lassie Come Home." Just as the other crewmen started shouting "You got him", the intercom went dead and cannon shells began exploding in the nose compartment, the first directly behind Sgt Williams. Sgt Williams was hit several places in the head and left leg by shell fragments. The navigator, 2Lt Frederick Seible was also hit in the legs. He yelled out "They got me." Almost immediately, and before Sgt Williams could get the first aid kit and move back to help Lt Seible, more 20 mm cannon shells came into the nose, killing Lt Seible. Sgt Williams could see the oxygen system

was on fire and knew the plane was doomed. He first started to drag Lt Seible to the nose hatch. Upon realizing he was dead, Sgt Williams dropped Lt Seible's body and moved on back to the escape hatch.

When it became obvious to the flight engineer, T/Sgt Walter L. Carpenter, "Lassie Come Home" was going to explode any second, he dropped down from the top turret and went into the cockpit. By then Lt Figie knew the plane was out of control and there was nothing more he could do. He and Sgt Carpenter went down through the fiery inferno into the nose, opened the escape hatch, both being burned in the process, and fell out. Sgt Williams arrived at the hatch a few seconds later, attached his chute and bailed out. There were flames on his chute harness, but the straps held and he descended safely.

The crew had barely left the plane when the plane exploded in an orange and black cloud. Sgt Williams was knocked unconscious by the explosion, but suffered no more injuries upon landing. Sgt Salo free-fell for some time before pulling the rip cord to open his chute. He and Sgt Wallaszek floated downward about 50 yards apart. Chunks of the "Lassie Come Home", including the engines and parts of the wings fell down around them. As they neared the ground, civilian workers in the fields shot at them, wounding Sgt Wallaszek in the right arm. After they had landed a German soldier home on leave ran to them and kept the civilians away from Sgts Salo and Wallaszek.

Fourth Element

No. 128, "Dear Becky"

Lt Beasley came over the intercom to warn the crewmen of "Dear Becky" that there were "bandits" in the area and the fighter escort had not shown up. A minute later, S/Sgt Walter H. Keirsey III, in the tail, spotted a large number FW 190s and Me 109s closing in on the Squadron from the rear. He yelled out "Here they come and they ain't ours!" Cannon shells were screaming around both sides of the plane, converging about 50 feet ahead of "Dear Becky" where they exploded in whitish puffs that looked like popcorn. Sgt Keirsey and S/Sgt Alvin P. Desisto, in the ball turret, began firing at two planes that were attacking "Dear Becky." Sgt Keirsey's plane, a FW 190, blew apart in the air, while the Me 109 that Sgt Desisto fired into went down, exploding upon hitting the ground. The flight engineer, S/Sgt William M. O'Neal, fired a burst into a Me 109, but the plane went on through the formation.

Fighters continued flashing past "Dear Becky" on both sides. Others slowly passed alongside the plane as they fired at aircraft up ahead. One FW 190 was close in on the left side, at "eyeball level" with Lt Beasley, but none of the

gunners saw him. The fighter was a highly polished light blue color. A long-nosed FW 190 flew alongside on the right side of "Dear Becky" not more than 70 yards away. The pilot was looking straight ahead, apparently intent on the B-17 at which he was firing. The pilot's oxygen mask was a pretty reddish orange color. Sgt Jack M. Alford was on the right waist gun. He fired a long burst into the FW 190 and the plane exploded. He kept firing at other fighters going by, none of which were more than 200 yards away. He then began firing on another FW 190 that keeled over, plunged to the ground and exploded. A Me 109 came in on the left wing and peeled out too fast for Sgt Alford to lock on him. A P-51, the fighter escort had now arrived, dived straight down between "Dear Becky" and the Group Lead plane, "Fearless Fosdick." The pilot was so intent on getting the Me 109 he barely missed the two bombers.

The radio operator, S/Sgt Robert M. Boice, left his position to go back into the fuselage to man the other waist gun, but the action was over before he could unhook from his oxygen and intercom, plug in the "walk-around" oxygen bottle and get back to the waist gun.

The damage was done. A right wing tank was hit and began spewing fuel out behind the wing. Apparently the shell broke apart inside the tank without exploding! Parts of the shell were recovered later from the tank during repairs. The exhaust on the No. 2 engine was hit, knocking out the supercharger and causing the prop to run away, which slowed the plane so much she could not maintain her place in the formation. "Dear Becky" dropped about 600-800 yards behind the rest of the Squadron. Realizing he could not stay in formation, Lt Beasley told the bombardier, 2Lt Bruce D. Pardue, to jettison the bombs, which he did, near Kassel.

"Dear Becky" struggled to stay with the formation for protection.

No. 996, "Boston Bombshell"

The navigator, 2Lt Hubert B. Carpenter, was working on the mission log as the action began to unfold. The togglier, Sgt Leslie D. Algee, yelled at him that he thought he saw fighters. Lt Carpenter told him to keep his eye on them and went back to working on the log. At that instant the plane's guns started firing and there were explosions all over the aircraft as "Boston Bombshell" was raked from one end to the other by cannon fire. The left wing was set ablaze between the No. 1 and 2 engines. "Boston Bombshell" immediately started spinning downward. Sgt Algee, raised up out of his seat to leave the aircraft. Lt Carpenter grabbed his chest pack chute, snapped it on and held onto the brace above the nose hatch to steady himself as he moved to the opening. There he saw Lt Dunlap lying in the

catwalk apparently unconscious. Just then Lt Dunlap came to and told Lt Carpenter to open the escape hatch. Lt Carpenter kicked it open and jumped.

As he left the plane, Lt Carpenter looked up and saw the No. 1 and 2 engines were now on fire. Although, he could not see No. 3 and 4 engines from where he was falling, they, too, were afire. In fact the entire aircraft was a mass of flames. Almost immediately thereafter, "Boston Bombshell" blew up. Pieces of plane fell around Lt Carpenter as he floated earthward. After a few seconds of floating, he pulled the ripcord--a little too soon as he suffered a terrific jolt when the canopy opened. He saw some woods off to the side of his line of descent and tried slipping the chute to head towards them. This resulted in the chute swinging rather wildly. Lt Carpenter hit the ground hard on a down swing, so hard that the force of hitting the ground burst the muscle fascia in his right leg. He started running towards the woods, but a German soldier yelled for him to halt. Lt Carpenter stopped, put his hands up and began his eight plus months as a POW.

Lt Dunlap bailed out just after Lt Carpenter and although with head wounds, survived to become a POW. Years later, Lt Dunlap was diagnosed as having cerebral palsy. In the process of examining his brain to diagnose the problem, the doctors observed a small piece of shrapnel in the brain. It had been lodged there all those years. Had it gone a fraction of an inch farther into the brain, Lt Dunlap would have been killed.

Eyewitness accounts from another aircraft indicated at least four other chutes appeared from the plane, but all were ablaze. Three crewmen apparently were trapped in the aircraft or had been killed during the fighter attacks. Only Lts Carpenter and Dunlap survived.

The Downward Dive

At the end of their runs on the High Squadron, most of the German fighters rolled over and dived downward through the Lead and Low Squadrons. Since the High Squadron was above and lagging behind the other two Squadrons, tail gunners and top turret gunners of the Lead and Low Squadrons were first to be aware as to what was coming at them. Tail gunners in particular had a ring-side view of the action above and behind them. Most witnessed fighters attacking the High Squadron and saw B-17s simply disappear into boiling black and orange clouds. This increased their sense of sinking foreboding as they saw the fighters wheeling over and plunging down upon them.

The Lead Squadron

1Lt David R. Hettema, flying No. 887, "Old Battle Ax", in the No. 3 position of the Lead Element, had a first inkling of what was taking place when his crew started screaming over the intercom that fighters were coming at them from above. He was helpless to do anything other than hold his place in the formation so as to provide maximum protection against the enemy aircraft. One element of three German fighters came in on "Old Battle Ax" at 0500 O'clock. The top turret gunner, S/Sgt William L. Lothian, fired a continuous burst at the second FW 190 in the element from 600 yards out until it went behind the tail. As the enemy aircraft broke away at 0700 O'clock, Sgt Lothian opened fire again. Smoke was pouring from the engine as the fighter nosed over and went straight down. No one else in "The Old Battle Ax" was able to fire at the fighter.

Two FW 190s came at 1Lt L C Basinger's plane, No. 234, "Bomber Dear", flying Lead of the Second Element. They dived down from above and behind the aircraft, leveling off slightly below "Bomber Dear" as they made their attack. S/Sgt Clifford O. Delgado, in the ball turret, fired 300-350 rounds into one FW 190 as it went to the left side of the bomber. The fighter banked to the right, going directly under the plane, and started spewing smoke from the engine. The pilot bailed out about 150 yards from "Bomber Dear" as his plane went down. In the tail, S/Sgt Howard D. Van Cleave had been watching as the fighters came in on the unsuspecting High Squadron and then rolled down on the his Lead Squadron. One of the FW 190s came directly at Sgt Van Cleave's position, firing its 20 mm cannon into the plane. He saw holes appearing in the tail and fuselage of "Bomber Dear". Sgt Van Cleave began firing at the fighter as soon as it came into range. He could see his tracers bouncing off the armor plate of the FW 190 as it kept coming closer and closer. He didn't think he could stop him before the fighter took him out. The German plane came in so close Sgt Van Cleave could see the eyes and facial features of the pilot. All of a sudden the fighter simply disintegrated in front of him. Saved! This was Sgt Van Cleave's 35th and final mission.

Two Me 109s came in at the No. 3 plane, No. 116, "Hi Ho Silver", in the Second Element, with 1Lt William I. Eblen in the left seat. The first fighter came directly at the tail position from 0600 O'clock level. The tail gunner, S/Sgt Charles D. Forcum, opened fire on the attacking Me 109 at 600 yards, firing about 400 rounds at him as he closed in on "Hi Ho Silver." Smoke began streaming from the cockpit and the prop stopped dead when the fighter

was about 75 yards from the tail of "Hi Ho Silver." The cowlings ripped off and the fighter immediately dropped under the bomber and went into a straight-down dive. Thirty seconds later another Me 109 attacking though the Fourth Element flying off to the left of, and now a little higher than, the Second Element suddenly swerved in at "Hi Ho Silver" from 0700 O'clock high. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt James B. Anderson, engaged the approaching fighter at around 700 yards, firing 500 rounds in one long burst. The Me 109 began to burn around the cowlings and then exploded when about 350 yards from the bomber.

Three FW 190s came at the Lead aircraft of the Third Element, No. 909, "Nine-O-Nine", flown by 1Lt William H. Dietrich. One orange colored FW 190 came in at 0530 O'clock, from behind the No. 2 plane in the formation. At 400 yards out, the tail gunner, S/Sgt Carl W. Kaese, began firing, continuing to do so until the enemy aircraft fell off at 150 yards and went down below "Nine-O-Nine", trailing black smoke as it dropped. Another FW 190 came in on "Nine-O-Nine" from slightly below the left wingman. The waist gunner, S/Sgt Richard D. Hallberg, pressed his trigger as soon as the enemy aircraft came into range, firing 150 rounds as it passed alongside the bomber. The fighter then went into a nose dive for about 1,000 feet, tried to pull up, burst into flames, flipped over on his back and exploded. A third FW 190 came at the aircraft from 0600 O'clock level, veering off to the left as it approached "Nine-O-Nine". The top turret gunner, T/Sgt Gaines C. Luther, started firing when the fighter was about 800 yards away. When about 200 yards out, the FW 190 started smoking, stalled out and fell off, dropped about 500 yards and blew up.

The flak barrage that had come up at the 324th Squadron also hit the No. 3 plane of the Third Element, No. 083, "Happy Valley Express", with 1Lt Hubert F. Donahue's crew aboard. There were minor hits in the nose, the right wing and right wing tanks, including the outside Tokyo tank, which began leaking fuel. At about the same time a Me 109 came in over the tail and dropped off in front of the nose. None of the gunners could get off shots at him for fear of hitting other bombers in the tight formation.

Flak going through the nose caused a minor wound on the right first finger of the Bombardier, 2Lt Alan G. Hillman. Lt Hillman will be killed in action, along with the top turret gunner, S/Sgt George G. Turner, while flying with 1Lt Cecil G. McConnell's crew on a mission to Cologne on 6 January. The Radio Operator, S/Sgt John N. Cardiff, will also be killed in the air on a mission to Frankfurt the 6th of November, with Cpt William E. Reid's Lead crew.

Two Me 109s and a FW 190 came in on No. 579, "Betty Lou's Buggy", in the No. 2 position of the Fourth Element, with 1Lt W. Reese Mullins' ("Moon Mullins", after a popular cartoon character of the day) crew aboard. The fighters dived down on "Betty Lou's Buggy" firing 20 mm cannon shells into the aircraft as they bore down upon her. Both the No. 3 and 4 engines were knocked out and the No. 2 engine hit, which thereafter was able to pull only about one half power. The Tail Gunner, S/Sgt Mabry D. Barker, the waist gunner, S/Sgt Robert D. Loomis, and the ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Kenneth L. Blackburn, all got off shots at the fighters, but did not score any hits. A 20 mm cannon shell hit the tail gun position knocking Sgt Barker off his seat. Fragments went through his right leg leaving a hole the size of a silver dollar. He quickly pulled himself back onto his seat in case other enemy aircraft came at them. None did.

At the same time, splinters from a shell that hit the top turret gun sight cut a crease along side of the backward facing T/Sgt Carl A. Dickson. Although a superficial wound, blood flowed down over his face as from a "stuck pig." The radio operator, T/Sgt James B. Knaub, hooked on a walk-around oxygen bottle and went to the tail gun position and dragged Sgt Barker back into the fuselage to administer to him. He cut loose Sgt Barker's pant leg, put on a bandage and went to give him a morphine shot. There was no morphine syrettes in any of the first aid kits on board the aircraft! Most likely someone had stolen them for the morphine.

"Betty Lou's Buggy" was now flying on only one and a half engines. Lt Mullins had the Bombardier, F/O Orville G. Chaney, jettison the bombs as they continued on with the Strike Force alone, under and north of the 91st formation.

1Lt Arvin O. Basnight's plane, No. 298, "White Cargo", flying Lead of the Fourth Element also was hit by flak just as the fighters came down through the formation. Two engines were knocked out. Lt Basnight struggled to hold his position in the formation. At almost the same time a FW 190 dived down on "White Cargo" from 0700 O'clock high and flattened out along the left side of the bomber. Lt Basnight lifted the left wing so that the ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Odell A. Davis, could line up on the fighter. Sgt Davis fired off about 60 rounds, observing pieces of the right wing fly off as the fighter banked to the right and went into a dive under "White Cargo." In spite of loss of power, Lt Basnight was able to keep "White Cargo" in formation to the target.

The Low Squadron

By the time the diving German aircraft had

reached the 401st Low Squadron, they were dispersed, flying wildly and unable to sight in on the bombers. Few Low Squadron aircraft sustained fighter damage.

1Lt Robert R. Goldsmith, pilot of No. 293, "Sunkist Sue", in the No. 3 position of the Lead Element, looked up and saw three planes in the High Squadron blow up. At about the same time he saw a FW 190 flying along the left side of "Sunkist Sue", so close he could see distinctly the face of the pilot. All the gunners were firing away at the plane, but none seemed to be hitting it. The FW 190 rolled over and went straight down and out.

In the Second Element, Cpt William H. Arthur, pilot of the Lead aircraft, No. 069, "Round Trip Topsy", looked back up through his top window and saw a FW 190 almost stalled out under Jack Leslie's plane, No. 126, pumping 20 mm cannon shells into the bomber at point-blank range. Lt Leslie's plane rolled over and exploded. It was not until years later that Cpt Arthur would learn his friend, Jack, had been killed in his plane.

A Me 109 that had been hit by a P-51 almost collided with No. 552, "The Peacemaker", flown by 1Lt Harry E. Garner's crew in the No. 3 position of the Second Element. Other German fighters passed by on the left side of "The Peacemaker", their cannons blazing away, but without hitting Lt Garner's plane.

In the Third Element, the Lead bomber, No. 504, "Times A-Wastin'", with 1Lt Joseph R. Lyons' crew aboard, came under attack by a FW 190 that plunged down from 0700 O'clock high. The tail gunner, Sgt Burdette E. Conner, began firing short bursts at the approaching fighter at 400 yards, continuing to do so until it was 200 yards away. The FW 190 flipped over on its back and Sgt Conner fired a long burst into the belly. The plane started wobbling crazily and seemed to be out of control as it dropped away and out of sight. At about the same time, Sgt Conner saw a ball turret from one of the bombers that had exploded in the High Squadron go sailing downward. He could see the gunner trapped inside the falling turret.

No. 851, "Qualified Quail", flown by 1Lt Gregory E. Good's crew in the No. 3 position of the Third Element, was not so lucky. She already had been hit hard by flak bursts as well as by fighters coming down through the formation. The No. 2 engine was knocked out. Shortly afterwards a FW 190 came directly at the tail gun position, with flaps down to slow his speed to that of "Qualified Quail", all the while firing 20 mm cannon shells into the wings of fuselage and the bomber. The tail gunner, Sgt Clarence W. Koeller, Jr., reported the fighter attack over the intercom and started firing at the enemy aircraft at 300 yards. Lt Good called out to Sgt Koeller to "Stay with him." Sgt Koeller could

see the tracers bouncing ineffectively off the armor plate of the fighter. A 20 mm cannon shell hit about two feet from Sgt Koeller, knocking out his oxygen connection. He looked down to reconnect the oxygen and when he looked back up, the fighter was only 200 yards away. Sgt Koeller fired off another burst as the FW 190 went into a straight-down dive. He yelled out "I got him; he's going down." As he looked backwards for more German fighters, Sgt Koeller saw a crewman from another bomber go down past the tail with his chute on fire.

At the same time Sgt Koeller was engaging his fighter, three other FW 190s came in at "Qualified Quail" from 0500 O'clock low. The ball turret gunner, Sgt Harry G. Hoskins, began firing at the leading fighter when it was about 400 yards away. The plane started trailing black smoke, banked to the left and went back out of the formation at 0600 O'clock. The other two FW 190s banked to the right and went on through the Squadron.

Just before the fighters came at the Low Squadron, the engineer and top turret gunner of "Qualified Quail", Sgt Herman S. Boncquet, had finished transferring gas into the inboard left wing tank, completely filling it. The radio operator, Sgt Truman H. Palmer, called up on the intercom to say an amplifier in the radio room had gone out. Sgt Boncquet came down out of the top turret and went into the radio compartment to replace the amplifier. He was sitting on the floor making the switch when Sgt Palmer leaned over and tapped Sgt Boncquet on the shoulder to tell him fighters were coming at them. At that very moment a 20 mm cannon shell hit the support post of the ball turret, exploding and showering the radio compartment with fragments. The skin of the fuselage next to where Sgt Palmer had been sitting was riddled with holes. He would have been killed had he not ducked down to warn of the fighters. Such was the margin of death and life. Sgt Boncquet went back up into his turret, and swung the twin .50s to the rear. The German fighters were long gone.

Two Me 109s came in on No. 984, "Sherrie's Cherries", flying Lead of the Fourth Element with 1Lt Harold A. Packard Jr. as command pilot. The first fighter, coming in from 0730 O'clock high, was engaged by the tail gunner, S/Sgt Nelson Richardson, when 800 yards out. Sgt Richardson gave him two short bursts and saw tracers entering at the root of the right wing. He then fired off a long burst, continuing to fire until the right wing and fuselage of the fighter just back of the pilot were engulfed in flames. The Me 109 went down.

The second Me 109 came in from 0800 O'clock high and was taken on by the top turret gunner, T/Sgt Oliver G. Sanders, Jr. Sgt Sanders started firing a continuous burst at 400 yards. He

could see his tracers entering the fuselage between the engine and cockpit. At about 200 yards the fighter winged over to the left and the pilot bailed out.

2Lt Wilbert W. Chouinard's crew was flying No. 308, "Stinky", in the No. 2 position in the Fourth Element. "Stinky" was hit by one of the Me 109s, that fired on her on its way to "Sherries' Cherries." An engine on the right wing was knocked out. None of the gunners were able to engage the fighter as it went by.

After going through the Low Squadron, the German fighters dived away from the pursuing American fighter escort and headed back to their bases. A FW 190, flown by Feldwebel ("Warrent Officer") Oscar Boesch, was hit in the left aileron, the undercarriage and in the 30 mm ammunition depot. Because of the damaged aileron, FW Boesch had to maintain an air speed of 220 km/hr to keep his plane stable. However, he could not land at this speed with his wheels down. FW Boesch put his FW 190 down in a wheels-up landing to slow his speed down. He landed on a grass air strip at Koehten, rather than on his paved airbase, so as to avoid catching fire and blowing up. FW Boesch was credited with downing one 324th bomber, most likely "Lassie Come Home." The action was too fast and furious for the German fighters to remember which bomber they took out.

On to the Target

Since he was in the very front of the 324th High Squadron and facing forward, Lt Crans saw none of the action taking place behind him. The fighters all broke downward without going past the Squadron Lead. However, his tail gunner, S/Sgt Patrick J. Walsh, had a full view of what transpired. Sgt Walsh simply blabbered incoherently over the intercom as he attempted to describe what he saw. Lt Crans yelled over the Squadron radio for the Squadron to "Close up, close up!" By this time there was no Squadron left to "close up."

When the action was all over, there were only three 324th planes left at altitude, Lt Crans' Lead aircraft, No. 890, "Fearless Fosdick", and No. 515, "The Wild Hare", of the Lead Element and No.085, "Yankee Belle", of the Second Element. Lt McCombs moved "Yankee Belle" over into the No. 3 position on the left wing of Lt Crans' aircraft. The three planes continued on in formation to the target.

Lt Beasley in No. 128, "Dear Becky", could not maintain air speed and dropped down below the three planes remaining at altitude. Lt Beasley continued on to the target since he had the strike camera in his plane. He gained a little altitude as "Dear Becky" went over the target in an attempt to keep away from the flak.

In the other Squadrons, two of the 24 planes had to drop out of the formation. One of these was No. 851, "Qualified Quail", in the Low Squadron. With one engine out and another losing power, Lt Good could not keep up with the formation. The Bombardier, 2Lt Owen G. Cooper, who had taken over the navigation duties when the assigned navigator became confused by all the action, salvoed the bombs at 1035 hours, 35 minutes before the target. This lightened the plane sufficiently that they could keep up with the Squadron, but remained several thousand feet below the rest of the planes as they flew on to the target. The oxygen system had been shot out, so the crew had to use walk-around bottles.

Forty-five minutes after the Me 109 and FW 190 fighters left and about 20 minutes before the target, the 91st formation was attacked by the recently deployed Me 163 rocket powered fighter. Several crewmen in the Group observed the bat-shaped fighter streak up through the formation to about 60,000 feet, leaving behind a trail of white smoke. At that altitude the engine cut out, all its fuel having been expended. The fighter banked over and swooped down on the bombers.

After it went down through the 91st formation, the Me 163 leveled off behind Lt Mullins' plane, No. 579, "Betty Lou's Buggy", which was flying alone, well below the rest of the bombers. The rocket fighter began firing on the tail of "Betty Lou's Buggy" as it came in on the bomber, but it missed. It then banked to the right and glided along just out of the range of the bomber's .50 caliber machine guns for about two minutes. Sgt Blackburn in the ball turret asked Lt Mullins to dip the left wing of "Betty Lou's Buggy" so that maybe he could get off a burst at the Me 163 with his twin fifties. Just then Lt Chaney, who had moved up from his Bombardier's position to man the top turret after Sgt Dickson had been wounded, told Sgt Blackburn to hold his fire. A P-51 was diving on the Me 163. The German rocket fighter nosed over and dived straight down, the P-51 in pursuit. The American fighter hit the Me 163 causing it to continue on straight down into the ground. The pilot did not bail out. Although Me 163s had been in the air in July, today was the first recorded encounter of this new fighter by bombers of the 8th Air Force.

Except for "Betty Lou's Buggy", the rest of the Lead aircraft dropped on the target at 1110 hours from 25,000 feet. When No. 298, "White Cargo", went over the target, none of the bombs fell. Flak had damaged the bomb release. Only two of the bombs from No. 083, "Happy Valley Express", dropped on the target. Lt Hillman was able to toggle the remaining three bombs four minutes later. No. 851, "Qualified Quail", which had salvoed her

bombs before the IP, was the only aircraft in the Low Squadron that did not drop on the target. The rest of the bombers released their M-17 incendiaries at 1110 hours at 24,500 feet.

The three remaining bombers in the High Squadron also dropped their bombs at 1110 hours, from 25,000 feet.

The Trip Home

Because of the damage incurred by the fighters, "The Wild Hare" could not maintain position with Lt Crans' after they left the target. Lt Witty therefore dropped down and joined up with the Low Squadron for the trip back to Bassingbourn.

When the fighters had departed, F/O Marpil's plane, No. 613, was out of formation and losing altitude. The togglier, S/Sgt Claude Carr, jettisoned the leaflet containers and F/O Marpil turned away to head back for England alone. There was an 80-90% cloud cover making it impossible to pick up any ground reference points. Since many of the maps were gone, Lt Winston was unable to set a precise course back to Bassingbourn. F/O Marpil asked him to pick some sort of a course that would get them to the North Sea where they could figure out the direction to take back to England. Lt Winston gave him the best estimate he could come up with and they headed home.

Soon afterward, as he was spinning around in his turret, Sgt Ponder, obviously sensitized to approaching fighters, saw a fighter coming in on No. 613. He fired at the approaching aircraft with his twin .50 caliber's, missing the plane. The pilot wagged his wings, exposing the RAF markings, to show he was a Spitfire as he moved on in under No. 613 to provide protection for awhile.

As No. 613 approached the coast, the route Lt Winston had selected unfortunately took them right over the port city of Bremen at 14,800 feet--almost on top of the noses of the anti-aircraft guns! There they came under intense anti-aircraft fire from the city defenses. The plane was hit in a number of places, knocking out several of the instruments and wounding Sgt Ponder in the face and hands. Even with all her damage, No. 613 remained in the air.

They made it across the North Sea, crossing onto land near Boreham. There F/O Marpil saw an emergency landing strip and headed for it--no electrical system, no hydraulics. As they approached the airfield the remaining three engines all cut out. F/O Marpil made a perfect dead-stick landing on the grass, narrowly missing a hanger as the plane rolled to a stop. The crew, except for Sgt Peters, who could not walk, unloaded, hitting the ground running. No. 613 was salvaged.

Lt Beasley could not keep up with the rest of the 91st formation on the way back. No. 128, "Dear Becky", slowly dropped behind the other bombers,

which were out of sight by the time she reached the Dutch coast. After calculating their rate of fuel consumption and amount left, Lt Beasley was not certain "Dear Becky" could make it across the North Sea. He had Sgt Boice radio Air Sea Rescue to be alert for them. Air Sea Rescue also gave Lt Beasley coordinates to an emergency field just beyond the English coast. Lt Beasley had all the rear crew come forward into the radio compartment to trim the plane. This allowed him to make an additional 20 MPH, ensuring that "Dear Becky" would make it back to Bassingbourn. Lt Beasley asked the navigator, 2Lt Charles R. Bright, to chart a course straight in to the base. This he did and "Dear Becky" landed without further incident. She was riddled with holes, had a 20 mm cannon shell in the No. 4 gas tank, a severed spar in the left wing and a 20 mm cannon shell hole in the rear of the No. 2 engine. In spite of her damage, "Dear Becky" was back in the air again for the next mission on the 24th of August. Once again, Lt Beasley's crew was aboard.

As No. 851, "Qualified Quail", approached Halle, the oxygen ran out, necessitating that Lt Good drop down even lower. He no longer could stay with the Squadron. He asked Lt Cooper to plot a course back to England as they headed back alone. Two P-51s came along side providing protection from enemy fighters until they ran short of fuel and had to break away. About 10 minutes out of Bassingbourn Lt Good had to feather the faltering engine. "Qualified Quail" landed without incident. When repairing "Qualified Quail" later that night, the ground crew found an unexploded dud 20 mm cannon shell in the left inboard wing tank. Had the shell exploded, "Qualified Quail" would have gone up, along with her crew, in a fiery inferno, the frivolous margin of death and life.

Because of the loss of power from two engines, Lt Basnight eventually had to take No. 298, "White Cargo", out of the formation and drop down to the deck to avoid further fighter attacks. He asked the Navigator, 2Lt Benjamin Badman, to figure out where they were and plot a course back to Bassingbourn. This Lt Badman did. The togglier, T/Sgt Phillip R. Taylor, was able to jettison two bombs half an hour beyond the target and the remaining three, ten minutes later. They headed on back alone, tossing out the guns, ammo and anything else loose to lighten the aircraft. "White Cargo" came back across the North Sea 400 feet off the water, landing safely at Bassingbourn at 1412 hours.

Although she turned back early, No. 579, "Betty Lou's Buggy", approached Bassingbourn just the rest of the Group arrived. With reduced power it was a slow, but safe trip back.

No. 088, "Redwing"

While the 91st Bomb Group was encountering German fighters and flak on the way to and from Halle, Lt Manville's crew and No. 088, "Redwing", also were having a rough time. Lt Manville, flying in the diamond position of the last element of the Low Box of the 457th Bomb Group, ran into very heavy flak about half way between the IP (Torgau, E-NE of Leipzig) and the target at Schkeuditz. "Redwing" was hit several times during the next 20 minutes. The No. 2 engine was knocked out and the radio operator, Sgt Ellwood F. Saxton, seriously wounded in the buttocks. The intercom box in the radio compartment was hit, knocking out communications within the plane. The ball turret gunner, Sgt Gareth H. Tanner, came up out of his turret, put on a walk-about oxygen bottle and put sulfur powder in Sgt Saxton's wounds. The navigator, 2Lt James Swaye, also went to the aid of Sgt Saxton, giving him a shot of morphine. Sgt Saxton lost consciousness and did not come to until he was in the hospital back in Bassingbourn. Sgt Tanner then went into the cockpit to tell Lt Manville what had happened. "Redwing" dropped her ten M-17 incendiary bombs on the target, as did the planes of the 457th Group, at 1121 hours from 24,500 feet. Because his aircraft was flying on three engines, Lt Manville could not keep up with the 457th formation and had to make the trip back alone. "Redwing" landed safely at Bassingbourn at 1415 hours.

The Aftermath

This obviously has been a bad day for the 91st Bomb Group. One of the worst during the past 21 months and 10 days, during which time the Group has flown 216 combat missions. Six of thirty-six aircraft sent over Germany were lost and one was left as salvage on the airbase at Boreham. Three of the four new crews that were on the mission were lost. Thirty-one crewmen were killed. Twenty-five became prisoners of war. All losses were from the 324th Squadron.

Needless to say there is a sense of desolation in the 91st Bomb Group billets this evening. The remaining crews of the 324th Squadron are especially depressed. 1Lt Billy D. Richardson, bombardier for Lt Basinger's 323rd Squadron crew, who flew today on No. 234, "Bomber Dear", went upstairs to the 324th billet that evening to try to find a friend. The room that held 15-20 crewmen was deserted, save for a solitary officer, sitting on his footlocker crying.

There are other bad days still to come. Of the 30 planes that returned to Bassingbourn today, 11 eventually will be shot down, three others will be destroyed when they crash-land in England and four more will be so badly battle-damaged they will be placed in salvage. Seventy-one crewmen flying

on these planes will be killed. Fifty will become prisoners of war.

One of the 13 planes that flew with the 324th Squadron today will survive the war. "Fearless Fosdick", with 1Lt Charles C. Whitesell's crew aboard will be shot down 21 November; four of the nine crewmen will be killed, the others becoming POWs. "The Wild Hare", flown by 1Lt Robert J. Flint, will be shot down 26 November 1944; five of the nine crewmen being killed, four becoming POWs. "Dear Becky" will also go down on 26 November with the copilot, 2Lt Richard E. Prunty, being killed; the remaining eight crewmen, including the pilot, 1Lt Adolph P. Miller, Jr., will become POWs. "Yankee Belle", with 1Lt George F. Miller's crew aboard, will crash-land in Germany after being hit by flak over Berlin on 3 February 1945; all nine crewmen will survive to become POWs. "Wee Willie" will be shot down on 8 April 1945. The sole survivor of the nine man crew, the pilot, 1Lt Robert E. Fuller, will become a POW. Only "Redwing" will endure the war to be recycled for her aluminum.

The thirty 91st Group crews who returned today will be more fortunate. Three will be lost--Lt Chouinard's crew (2 November, 7 KIA, including Lt Chouinard, and 2 POW), Lt Faris (2 November, 3 KIA, 6 POW) and Lt McConnell and his crew (6 January, 4 KIA, 5 POW). Three other crewmen who flew today will be killed in action and three will become POWs.

New bombers will arrive from Prestwich, Scotland tomorrow to replace those lost today. Replacements for the crews also will begin moving in to the 324th Squadron tomorrow. Four crews will transfer from the other three squadrons--from the 401st, Cpt William H. Arthur's crew; from the 322nd, 1Lt Gordon M. Browne and his crew; from the 323rd, the crews of, 1Lt Arnold J. O'Toole and 2Lt Robert J. Flint. On the 26th of November Lt Flint and his crew will be shot down on a mission to Altenbeken. Only Lt Flint and three others of the eight crewmen aboard will survive to become POWs. On the 19th of August, three newly arriving crews will be assigned to the 324th, those of 2Lt Hooper R. Maplesden, 2Lt William V. Laws and 2Lt Thomas C. Martin. Lt Law's copilot, 2Lt Bernard Goldstein, will be killed in action while flying with 2Lt Ralph E. Stolz on 11 November. The rest of the new crewmen will survive the war. The 324th Squadron will put up 12 planes for the next mission on the 24th of August. The war will go on.

But, this is today. Lt Richardson hesitates, then quietly backs out the door and slowly retraces his steps down the stairs. The solitary 324th Squadron officer is left alone with his grief in the empty, darkening billet. It was a long 40 seconds over Eisenach.



George B. Gaine's crew, photographed while in advanced crew training at Alexandria, LA, before being assigned to the 91st Bomb Group. Left to right. Front row: 2Lt George B. Gaines, pilot; 2Lt J C Bowlen, copilot; 2Lt Elliot Winston, navigator; 2Lt Mando A. Cavaleri, bombardier. Back row: Sgt Joseph B. Nealon, flight engineer; Sgt Gerald J. Peters, radio; S/Sgt Truley S. Ponder, ball turret; Sgt Clayton O. Tyson, waist gunner; Sgt Clem J. Pine, tail gunner; unknown waist gunner removed from the crew when arrived in England. Lt Gaines broke an ear drum and was stood down from flying. Lt Cavaleri was removed from the crew soon after arriving at Bassingbourn to become a lead bombardier; he was killed in action over Berlin on 3 February 1945. The rest of the crew flew with F/O Louis C. Marpil on 16 August 1944 on a mission to Halle. Sgt Tyson was killed on this mission. (Elliot Winston)



Vincent A. Fonke crew. Left to right. Front row: 2Lt Vincent A. Fonke, pilot; 2Lt Fred W. Vansant, copilot; 2Lt Herbert Carlson, bombardier; 2Lt Robert W. Simcock, navigator. Back row: S/Sgt Raymond Prange, flight engineer; S/Sgt Wendell Meenach, radio; Sgt Charles S. Brudo, ball turret; Sgt William J. Weaver, waist gunner; Sgt Willard M. Holden, tail gunner; Sgt Mike Kelly, waist gunner (removed from crew). Sgt Holden was killed when No. 012 was shot down on 16 August 1944. (Vincent Fonke)

Pandemonium Over Pilsen: The Forgotten Final Mission

By mid April 1945 the war in Europe was winding down rapidly. The Soviets were fighting in the suburbs of Berlin, and had occupied much of the eastern region of Germany to the north and south of the city. From the west, American and British forces were moving swiftly in a broad front across central and southern Germany. General Patton's Third Army was closing on the Czechoslovakian border. It was obvious to all that the final collapse of German ground forces was only a matter of days.

Still, the air war was continuing unabated. Heavy bomber missions were being flown almost every day. However, substantive strategic targets were becoming fewer and fewer. Most heavy industrial plants were either in Allied hands or lay in ruins. The rail transportation system was in shambles. There was little opportunity for the Germans to move war materials that were being produced to their collapsing front line forces.

German fighter command was ineffective. Although a large number of fighter aircraft were available, many of them Me 262 jet fighters, there were neither enough experienced pilots nor adequate fuel supply to put sufficient numbers of aircraft in the air to disrupt our bomber formations. Allied fighters controlled the air over Europe. Anti-aircraft defenses, on the other hand, were potentially effective around the few remaining targets. German gunners were capable of throwing up large quantities of accurate anti-aircraft fire. The 8th Air Force was therefore faced with the problem of identifying targets of sufficient strategic importance to warrant risking lives of the airmen.

One of the few major industrial plants not yet damaged by allied bombing was the Skoda Armament plant at Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. Although long a potential strategic target, it had not been bombed because of its location within a Czech city. The Skoda plant produced tanks, heavy guns and ammunition. While some of these materials were being sent directly to the front, most of the production would not reach the front in time to have an effect on the Allied advances. Therefore, the Skoda plant did not seem a target worthy of the risk. However, other factors came into consideration when evaluating the priority of the Skoda plant for targeting.

By Spring 1945, it had become obvious to the Western Allies that the Soviets were positioning themselves to lay political claim to as much of post-war Eastern Europe and Germany as possible. Bickering and lack of cooperation on the part of the Soviet negotiators over plans for governance of the liberated countries of Eastern Europe

and of occupied Germany had raised the specter of the coming "Cold War" in the minds of many at the higher political levels in England and the United States. It was also assumed all usable industrial machinery would be stripped from factories in occupied territories and shipped back to the Soviet Union to rebuild her postwar industry. This industrial capacity would be put to use in strengthening the military posturing against the Western Allies. Destruction of the Skoda plant would prevent usage of its industrial machinery by the Soviets.

Concern was also growing over what would happen when the main forces of the approaching Soviet and Western armies came together. Some feared that the Russians might keep driving westward to ensure their perceived territorial prerogatives. A bombing mission in strength that deep in Europe, combined with other strikes, would provide a show of force as to the air might of the Western Allies.

Although the mission request came from General Eisenhower at SHAEF, the above political factors most likely weighed heavily in the decision that resulted in Field Order No. 696. The Field Order was sent out from the 8th Air Force at 2323 hours on 24 April, laying on a mission to the Skoda Armament plant at Pilsen the next day. One sticky problem needed to be resolved in this decision. There were approximately 40,000 men and women employed by the Skoda plant. These workers were primarily Czech civilians and conscripted (slave) laborers. The death of innocent Czech workers would not do much to foster post-war good will between eastern Europeans and the Western Allies. To reduce the potential of civilian deaths, P-51 Mustangs had been sent over Pilsen the 24th to drop leaflets warning the workers a strike on the factory was planned the next day and to stay away from the plant. Further, the BBC had begun broadcasting warnings to the Czech workers the night before that a strike on Pilsen was imminent and that they should stay away from the Skoda plant. On the morning of the 25th of April Allied Headquarters released the following warning over the BBC: "Allied bombers are out in great strength today. Their destination is the Skoda works. Skoda workers, get out and stay out until the afternoon." This was the only time a warning of a target had been issued ahead of a mission.

Field Order 696 sent eight Groups of B-17s of the 1st Air Division to Pilsen. Ten Groups of B-24s of the 2nd Air Division were targeted for rail centers at Salzburg, Bad Reichenhall, Hallstein, and

Trauenstein. Nine Groups of B-17s in the 3rd Air Division would drop food supplies to several German-occupied Dutch cities during the afternoon of the 25th. The mission of the 3rd Air Division would later be rescinded because of adverse weather conditions.

In the 1st Air Division, the 40th Combat Wing sent the 92nd and 305th Groups. The 92nd was the Division Lead, with the 305th following. LTC William H. Nelson, call sign "Foxhole Able", was the 1st Division Air Commander. The other two Combat Wings each sent all three of their Groups (listed in their order in the strike force): 41st Combat Wing—303rd, 379th and 384th; 1st Combat Wing—398th, 91st and 381st. The 92nd and 398th Groups each put up four Squadrons while the other Groups sent out the usual three Squadrons.

The 91st Bomb Group, flying out of Bassingbourn, had as its target the airfield at Pilsen. About 100 German aircraft, many of them fighters, including jet Me 262s, had been observed on the field by reconnaissance planes. The other Groups were targeted on the Skoda plant itself.

The 91st formation for the day included the 322nd Squadron, flying as Group Lead, the 323rd High Squadron and the 324th Low Squadron. The 401st Squadron was stood down for the mission. LTC Donald H. Sheeler, call sign "Swordfish Baker", flying as copilot with Cpt Rayolyn W. Schroeder's crew, was the Group Lead. 1Lt Leslie S. Thompson, Jr. was first pilot and Squadron Lead for the 323rd Squadron.

First pilots and planes from the 324th Squadron for this mission were as follow: First (Lead) Element: Lead plane, 1Lt William J. Auth, No. 588, "Klette's Wild Hares", with LTC Immanuel ("Manny") L. Klette, the 324th CO flying as copilot and Squadron Leader (this was Manny Klette's 91st bombing mission); No. 2 position (on the right wing of the lead plane), 1Lt John E. Nichol, No. 623; No. 3 position (left wing of the lead plane), 1Lt Edgar M. Moyer, No. 000, "Extra Special." Second Element: Lead and Deputy Squadron Lead, 1Lt William E. Gladitsch, No. 884; No. 2, 2Lt Armando P. Crosa, No. 889, "Chippewa--The Milwaukee Road"; No. 3, 1Lt John L. Hatfield, No. 061, "General Ike." Third Element: Lead, 2Lt Gordon A. Woolard, No. 959, "Rhapsody in Red"; No. 2, F/O Louis Schafts, No. 880; No. 3, 1Lt William P. Steffens, No. 772, "Sweet Freda." Fourth Element: Lead, 1Lt George S. McEwen, No. 153; No. 2, 2Lt Earl G. Pate, Jr., No. 844, "Yankee Gal"; No. 3 (both Squadron and Group "Tail-end Charlie"), 2Lt Raymond W. Darling, No. 936.

Since this was to be a long mission, with an early departure, the crews were awakened in time for breakfast at 0200 hours. Briefing was at 0300. The bomb load for the Lead and Low Squadrons

was twenty 250 pound General Purpose bombs; the High Squadron aircraft each carried six 500 pound General Purpose bombs and four M-17 incendiaries. The Aiming Point (AP) for the 322nd and 324th Squadrons was the center of the runways, while the 323rd was to aim on the west hanger on the south side of the field. The crews were briefed to make every possible attempt to keep their bombing patterns within the target area to avoid unnecessary damage to nearby civilian areas and loss of life to Czech nationals. As were the orders to all eight Groups, bombing on the primary target was to be visual only. Bombing altitudes were: Lead Squadron, 22,000 feet; High, 22,500 feet; Low, 21,500 feet.

The secondary target was a visual run on the railway traffic center on the east side of Munich. The AP for the 322nd Lead Squadron was the Goods Depot, for the 323rd High Squadron, the main station and for the 324th Low Squadron, the bridge over the rail yards. The Number three target was a H2X drop (bombing by radar bombsight) on the Main Railway Station in Munich.

A scouting force, call sign "Buckeye Black", consisting of six P-51 fighters would provide target weather conditions to "Foxhole Able" 45 minutes prior to time over target. A screening force of four mosquito aircraft, call sign "Small Leak Blue", would rendezvous with the 91st Lead at 0955 hours, 40 minutes from the primary target. The target to be attacked would be determined at that time. Upon receiving this information, "Small Leak Blue" would accompany the Group Lead to the appropriate IP where the screening aircraft would pull ahead and drop chaff (aluminum strips designed to foil German anti-aircraft radar) in the target area.

The 324th Squadron crews were at station at 0430 hours. While Lt Steffen's crew was going through their preflight checks, Sgt William L. Swanson, the radio operator, tuned in to the BBC. The message to the Skoda workers in Pilsen telling them a Strike Force was being sent out today and that they should not go to work was going out over the air. The planes started engines at 0515 hours, taxied at 0525, with the Group Lead aircraft lifting off at 0530. Lt Auth's Lead plane of the 324th Squadron became airborne at 0540. All 324th planes were in the air by 0605 hours.

Although ground fog prevented terrain observation and high cloud cover over East Anglia was 10/10, weather was not a major problem for the 91st Group assembly. The Group Lead aircraft reached the assembly altitude of 5,000 feet at 0540 hours. All 91st aircraft were in formation seven minutes before the briefed departure time. The Group left the base area at 0642 hours, only one minute behind schedule.

The 398th Group was a little early in arriving at the 1st Combat Wing assembly and had to do a small "S-ing" to get into position. On the whole, the 1st Combat Wing assembly was very good. However, the Division assembly was somewhat ragged. The 1st Combat Wing was early and the 40th Combat Wing slightly late in arriving at the Division assembly point. The 1st Combat Wing had to make a big "S-ing" to allow the two Combat Wings ahead of them to slip into the proper position.

The English coast was crossed at 0727 hours, at 5,000 feet and the continental coast at 0737, still at 5,000 feet. Someone else in the 1st Combat Wing was using the 91st Group Lead's call sign, confusing communications within the 91st Group. Further, the 602nd High Squadron of the 398th Group just ahead of the 91st, continually flew wide and back, getting into the way of the 91st. It was difficult for the 91st to stay in formation and maintain the proper separation. At 0818 hours the 1st Division started climbing to the bombing altitude, reaching 22,000 feet at 1022, four minutes before the IP. About half way through the climb, the 381st Group passed the 91st, relegating the 91st to the eighth, and last, place in the Pilsen Strike Force for the rest of the mission.

Radio operators in many of the 91st planes were listening in on the BBC to break the monotony of the long flight. At about 0930 hours, only an hour before the target, the BBC once again was sending warning messages to the Czech workers in the Skoda plant that a Strike Force was on its way to Pilsen. The workers were told to get out of the plant immediately. This established a reasonably precise timing as to when to expect the bombers over Pilsen.

The 324th Squadron formation was a little ragged from the time the Group left the continental coast to the IP. The Third and Fourth Elements, in particular, were flying loose and too far behind the formation. As the 91st approached the IP, there was a jamming up of Squadrons as they began their bomb runs, on slightly different headings and at too close intervals. Between the IP and the target, however, the 324th tightened up with the planes tucking in close together.

Up to this point, the Pilsen mission was progressing routinely. However, as the Strike Force approached the target, things became exceptionally confused and harrowing. For starters, "Buckeye Black" had gotten lost and reported cloud conditions over Prague (0/10) instead of Pilsen. Cloud cover over Pilsen was 7-8/10. This was discovered only as the Lead Group approached the target, too late to switch to the secondary target. Further, German anti-aircraft artillery were waiting for them. The BBC messages to the Czech workers obviously had been heard by the Germans. Mobile flak batteries had been concentrated in and around the target area. Tracking flak hit the Strike Force,

starting about three minutes from the target and ending just beyond bombs away. Most of the bursts were black, with a few white bursts mixed in. As the first Groups went over the target, the flak was designated as "meagre and inaccurate. The German gunners did not yet have the proper range.

Because of the dense cloud cover, the Lead Squadron bombardiers in all Groups had trouble identifying their aiming points (APs). In the 92nd Lead Group, the Lead Squadron bombardier could not see the AP and the Squadron made a 360 to the right to go over the target, and through the flak, again. It dropped on the second run. The High Squadron also failed to see its AP and made a 360 to drop on the second run. Both the Low and Low-Low Squadrons had to make two 360s before spotting their APs, finally dropping on the third run over the target. None of the three Lead bombardiers in the 305th Group could spot the AP and the entire Group made one 360, dropping on the second run.

The 41st Combat Wing Groups also experienced trouble in identifying their APs. All three Squadrons of the 303rd Group failed to find their APs on the first run over the target. After making a 360 and picking an alternate AP, all Squadrons bombed on the second pass. The Lead Squadron of the 379th Group was unable to bomb visually on the first run so aborted and made a 360 and dropped on the second run. Both the Low and High Squadrons were able to see their APs and dropped on the first run. For the return to England, the Low and High Squadrons headed on back from the rally point without waiting for the Lead Squadron. After completing its second pass over the target, the Lead Squadron joined up with the 91st Group for the trip back across the continent.

On the first pass, none of the bombardiers of the 384th Group identified the AP and the entire Group made a 360. On the second run, the Lead and Low dropped, but the High Squadron had to make another 360 before identifying the target and dropping on the third pass over the target. The last 384th Group plane dropped at 1116 hours, presumably the last bombs dropped on Europe by the 8th Air Force. The Lead and Low Squadrons circled in the vicinity of Frankfurt until the High Squadron caught up with them for the trip back to their base at Grafton-Underwood.

In the 1st Combat Wing, none of the four Squadron Lead bombardiers of the 398th Group could find his AP. The entire Group made a 360, with all Squadrons dropping on the second pass over the target.

The available records for the 381st Group are unclear. It appears at least one Squadron made a 360 back over the target, while the other two Squadrons dropped on their first pass.

As they approached the target, the crewmen in the 324th were obviously nervous because of what they saw happening ahead of them. Since it was last in the bomber stream, the 91st was flying into utter chaos ahead. Entire Groups or individual Squadrons were making 360s and trying to find space to wedge back into the bomber stream for another pass over the target. Other Squadrons were heading to their Group rally point and making 360s while waiting for the rest of the Group to complete their 360s over the target and join up for the return flight.

The 324th crews saw planes in the groups ahead of them going down, as well as from Squadrons now moving in behind them for another pass over the target. From the Lead 92nd Group, No. 369 with Lt Lewis B. Fisher's crew aboard went down (6 KIA); from the 305th Group, No. 300, "Fancy Pantz", Lt. Gerald S. Hodges' crew; from the 303rd, No. 447, Lt Warren Mauger (3 KIA); from the 384th Group, No. 501, "Sweet Chariot", Lt Andrew G. Lovett; from the 398th Group, No. 266, "Godfather's Inc", Lt Allen F. Fergusen, Jr. (6 KIA) and No. 652, "Stinky Jr", Lt Paul A. Coville (1 KIA). In addition, two aircraft from the 379th Group (No. 178, "Seattle Sue", Lt James M. Blain and No. 272, "The Thumper", Lt Robert C. Evans) collided in mid air as a result of flak damage. Both planes went down in Allied territory. All nine crewmen aboard "Seattle Sue" and the tail gunner aboard "The Thumper" were killed. A number of planes were falling out of formation with engines out or fires aboard. The crewmen in the other planes could only assume these aircraft were going down, too.

Further, the flak became much more intense and accurate with each run over the target. By the time the 324th Squadron approached the target, it was especially intense. Most crewmen in all three Squadrons of the 91st Group, as well as many of those in the other Groups, said the flak was among the most accurate and intense they had encountered on any mission, including those to Berlin. Seeing the flak concentration over the target and other planes exploding and falling out of formation obviously made an impression on the pilots of the typically vulnerable Low Squadron. As a result, the 324th formation became exceptionally tight as they headed in over the target.

In spite of the heavy cloud cover, the Lead bombardier in No. 852 of the Lead Squadron, 1Lt Stephen Lada, got a visual fix on the AP and dropped his bombs. The rest of the Squadron toggled on his smoke streamer. Just after bombs away, No. 306, "The Biggest Bird", the lead plane in the Fourth Element, was hit in the right wing, knocking out both No. 3 and 4 engines, disabling the supercharger on an engine on the left wing, and severing the rudder control cables. When the

toggler, S/Sgt Francis N. Libby, toggled the bombs, eleven of the twenty 250 pounders hung up and would not drop. With only one functional engine, the pilot, 1Lt Robert Marlow, took the plane down to the deck to regain power in the engine without the supercharger. Although the crew dumped out all loose equipment, it became clear the aircraft could not make it back to Bassingbourn with the added weight of the bombs. The bombs could not be jettisoned since by then they were over occupied Allied territory. The bombs were pinned to prevent them from becoming armed and were kept aboard.

Lt Marlow looked for the nearest emergency field, finally putting down on a former German grass airstrip about 50 miles north of Nurnberg. When they touched down, Lt Marlow discovered the brakes had also been shot out. The plane careened over the grass, ground looping and eventually coming to rest in some woods at the edge of the field. U. S. Army ground troops came by in a Jeep as the crew was getting out of the plane. The troops told the crew to hide in the woods to avoid German civilians until a truck could get there to pick them up. American bomber crews were not popular in that part of Germany. A truck soon arrived and picked up all of Lt. Marlow's crew. They returned to Bassingbourn three days later, the last 91st crew to return from a mission over Europe.

2Lt Glennon J. Schone's plane, No. 790, "Oh Happy Day", flying as Tail-End Charlie of the Lead Squadron (No. 3 position in the Fourth Element) was hit by flak just before bombs away. Although damage to the aircraft was minimal, the navigator, 2Lt Arah J. Wilks, was hit by a piece of flak about the size of a half-dollar that imbedded itself in his right thigh. By only a minute or so Lt Wilks was the next to last crewman in the 91st to be wounded in the air.

Both No. 596, "Sweet Dish", No. 3 in the Second Element and No. 308, "Stinky", No. 3 in the Lead Element were hit hard by flak over the target, but remained in formation. Both returned to Bassingbourn without problem. Likewise, No. 901, "Star Dust", No. 2 of the Lead Element, was hit in a Tokyo tank (outer wing tanks added to the original design of the B-17 to increase its range) by flak just before the target. She, too, remained in formation for the trip home.

As the other two Squadrons came over the target, neither Lead bombardier could locate his AP and the Lead planes did not drop. The High Squadron Lead, 1Lt Leslie S. Thompson, Jr., in No. 630, "Geraldine", ordered the Squadron to make a 360 to go over the target again. This they did. However, there was a lot of concern on the part of the other crews as they did so. The radios were going wild as they headed for the target again. 2Lt Willis C. Schilly, 1st pilot of No. 964, flying in the

No. 3 position of the Second Element thought to himself, "If we don't drop this time, I will not go over again." No. 540, "Ramblin' Rebel", with 1Lt Leland C. Borgstrom's crew aboard, was flying on the right wing of the Lead plane of the Second Element. There was discussion between Lt Borgstrom and the copilot, F/O Quentin E. Eathorne, as to whether they should go over again. Although F/O Eathorne was unhappy about the situation, they stayed with the formation and made a second run over the target. Other pilots and crews were upset at having to make the another pass through the flak, but all stayed in formation. Because the return leg of the 360 was close to the target, and the flak, many crewmen thought they were going over the target, assuming later they had made three runs, instead of two.

No. 636, "Outhouse Mouse", on her 139th mission, with 1Lt Elmer ("Joe") Harvey as first pilot, accidentally jettisoned her bombs about nine minutes before the first run over the target. She stayed in formation with the Squadron on the first run. On the bomb run "Outhouse Mouse" took a flak hit that knocked out the No. 3 engine and severed all but two of the elevator control cables. However, she was able to remain in formation as the 323rd made the 360 and went over the target again. After coming off the target the second time, "Outhouse Mouse" could not maintain her position and had to drop out of the formation to return alone on a more direct flight back to England. She called for fighter support and eight P-51s escorted her most of the way out of Germany. Lt Harvey brought her down at Bassingbourn at 1428 hours, about half an hour ahead of the rest of the Squadron.

None of the other planes in the 323rd High Squadron received major damage; six had minor damage and the other five had no damage.

It was when the Lead of the 324th Squadron did not drop that things started falling apart for the 324th. As the Squadron went over the target, the Deputy Lead bombardier in No. 884, 1Lt Joseph G. Weinstock, had the target in his bombsight. He also saw that the Lead plane did not drop and that its bomb bay doors were going up, indicating to him the Lead was unable to drop and was aborting the bomb run. At that very instance, a shell burst next to the nose of No. 884, knocking out the No. 2 engine, spewing metal off the cowlings and causing the plane to start to drop out of formation. The same burst threw a large shard of flak through the skin of the nose, hitting Lt Weinstock's shoulder and knocking him to the back of the compartment. As he fell backwards, Lt Weinstock toggled the bombs, at 1037 hours. With so much flak in the air and planes going down, the other toggliers were concentrating on watching for a smoke streamer on which to release their own bomb loads. When the

streamer appeared from the Deputy Lead, all but Lt Nichol's plane, No. 623, dropped. His togglier, T/Sgt Joseph J. Zupko, realized the Squadron Lead had not dropped and held the bombs.

As the Low Squadron Lead plane, No. 588, went over the target, the bombardier, 1Lt Robert E. Finch, said he could not see the AP. Klette told the first pilot, Lt Auth, "Well, we'll go around" and started closing the bomb bay doors. Lt Auth then started a 360 and Klette broke radio silence to tell the other pilots in the Squadron to follow him back over the target.

That was when pandemonium broke loose on the radio. All pilots began yelling at once telling Klette that they had dropped and were not going to go around and through the flak again. Someone told him that "If you are going back over again, you are going alone." With all the pilots yelling at once it is unclear what, if any, of the things the pilots were saying that Klette heard. Klette came back on the air telling them to "Be quiet. We are going around again. I don't want to discuss this. It's an order." None of the pilots said anything after that. But after they had made about a 180° turn, the other planes still flying at the briefed altitude broke formation and scattered.

When the No. 2 plane in the Lead Element, No. 623, went over the target it took a flak hit that knocked out the No. 1 engine and blew part of the cowlings off No. 2. No. 2 engine soon went out and the plane began losing altitude. Since his aircraft had not dropped, Lt Nichol attempted to go on around with Klette even though falling below the Squadron formation. When the copilot, 1Lt Lawrence E. Gaddis, realized what Lt Nichol was doing, he went out of control. He yelled over the intercom that he was taking over the plane and that they were not going through the flak again. He asked someone to come up and get Lt Nichol out of the pilot's seat.

After experiencing the flak over the target once, and realizing it would be even more accurate on the next run, the crew of No. 623 was in agreement with Lt Gaddis. One of the crewmen grabbed the landing gear crank and went into the cockpit to convince Lt Nichol to abort the 360. In the meantime the other crewmen were yelling over the intercom for Lt Nichol not to go around. By this time they were down to 18,000 feet, well below the rest of the Squadron. Finally realizing the folly of going over the target again alone and at such a low altitude, Lt Nichol banked the plane around the air field and let the bombs fly in the vicinity of the target, releasing them at 1047 hours.

Even with the bomb load out, the aircraft continued losing altitude. The crew tossed out everything loose to lighten the plane. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Delbert J. Augsburger, asked

permission to jettison the ball turret, but Lt Nichol told him "No." No. 623 finally leveled off at about 7,200 feet. With insufficient power to get back in formation, T/Sgt Carl Greco, the acting navigator for the mission, plotted a course back to Bassingbourn slightly north of the briefed route. They headed back alone, at 97 MPH. Although they had not seen any German fighters up to this point in time, the threat was always there. They fired off flares and called for fighter escort. Some P-51s joined them, but even by lowering their flaps and wheels, the fighters could not slow down enough to stay with No. 623. The fighters had to leave No. 623 and Lt Nichol's crew to make it back on their own.

The situation was less hectic in Lt Moyer's plane, No. 000, "Extra Special", on the left wing, in the No. 3 position, of the Lead Element. When the call came from Klette to do a 360 back over the target, the togglier, Sgt V D Stockton, told Lt Moyer to tell Klette that he had toggled the bombs on the Deputy Lead smoke marker. But, Klette had said he was ordering them to go around. About this time some of the pilots, including Lt Moyer, thought they heard someone coming in over the radio saying that anyone who had dropped could join up with another group for the return. Accordingly, Lt Moyer broke formation and looked for somewhere else to join up before the rest of the crew got unduly agitated. Sighting planes from the 305th Group rallying nearby, Lt Moyer headed for their formation. Since the Germans were known to put up captured B-17s to infiltrate formations, it took some time before "Extra Special" was allowed to join up. Eventually she was let in and flew on back to England with the 305th. When the Group reached England, Lt Moyer left the 305th formation and flew on to Bassingbourn, arriving there about 45 minutes before the rest of the Squadron.

In the Second Element, Lt Gladitsch in the Lead plane, No. 884, had taken flak hits that knocked out the Nos. 1 and 2 engines. With only two engines pulling full power No. 884 was unable to stay in formation. They had dropped to about 10,000 feet when the No. 1 engine started up again and began pulling a little power. By throwing out all the loose equipment, including the .50 caliber machine guns and the radios, Lt Gladitsch was able to maintain this altitude. Lt Gladitsch broke radio silence and got permission from Klette to leave the formation and return to England. No. 884 flew slightly behind and below the 91st Group formation and made it on back to Bassingbourn. Some 324th planes fell into formation with No. 884 on her way back.

In the No. 2 position of the Second Element, Lt Crosa's plane, No. 889, "Chippewa--the Milwaukee Road", was buffeted badly by the flak as she went over the target. Sgt James H. Wyant, the

ball turret gunner, was watching the massive flak bursts breaking under and around him. It was the worst flak he had experienced. It just "kept it up and kept it up." Two pieces of flak came through the nose, knocking out the Plexiglas and a number of holes appeared in the fuselage and wings. Sgt Wyant assumed they would not make it through the flak. He rotated the ball turret to the exit position and went up into the plane where he could get to his chute when he had to bail out. But, No. 889 did make it through the flak without serious damage. As soon as they cleared the flak, Sgt Wyant climbed back into the turret to watch for German fighters.

In the meantime, Lt Crosa was continuing on a 360 turn along with Klette. Although the crew was surprised that the Squadron was making a turn back towards the target, Lt Crosa broke formation, along with six or seven other planes, before the crewmen understood what was happening and became unduly concerned.

As Lt Hatfield's plane, No. 061, "General Ike", flying in the No. 3 position in the Second Element, came up on the target, the crew saw clouds of flak and planes going down. Sgt Emil A. Kubiak, in the ball turret, tried to call out the flak bursts, but they were all over the place, way too many to take evasive action. "General Ike" made it to the target without major damage. The togglier, Sgt Vernon E. Thomas, triggered the bomb release on the smoke streamer from the Deputy Lead. At the same time, the flight engineer, Sgt Victor Maguire, Jr., hit the salvo switch and Lt Hatfield pulled the bomb release in the cockpit. The bombs dropped! Just after the bombs fell away, a flak burst hit the bomb bay doors so that they would not come up. The tail gunner, Sgt Alfred G. Miller, plugged in his "walk-around" oxygen tank and came up to help Sgt Maguire put out the fires and crank up the bomb bay doors. The radio operator, Sgt Vincent W. Karas, went back and manned the tail guns while this was going on. As the bomb bay doors were going up, the crew noticed a fire in the bomb bays. Smoke started filling the plane, adding to all the confusion of the flak bursting around the plane. Sgt Maguire pulled wires rapidly, while Sgt Miller fought the fire. It soon was put out.

About that time Lt Hatfield switched the radio transmissions from the Lead plane into the intercom. Klette's voice came through ordering the Squadron around again. Lt Hatfield went part way around with Klette, but broke formation the same time as did the other planes in the Squadron. "General Ike" made a tight 360 inside the other planes about a mile south of the target and started home alone. Shortly after leaving the target area one of the crew reported "bandits" closing in on them. However, the fighters proved to be P-51 Mustangs. Over friendly Allied occupied territory a couple of

other planes, with feathered engines, joined up with "General Ike" to continue on back to Bassingbourn.

In the Third Element, Lt Woolard's Lead plane, No. 959, "Rhapsody in Red", dropped on the Deputy Lead smoke streamer at 1037 hours. However, the plane was hit very hard by flak over the target. One engine was knocked out and another was pulling only one half power. A piece of flak came up through the bottom and imbedded itself behind the pilot's seat. It had knocked out the hydraulic system on the way up into the plane. With the loss of power, "Rhapsody in Red" could not stay in formation and had to drop out to return alone.

No. 880, flying in the No. 2 position with Lt Schaft's crew aboard, also dropped with the Deputy Squadron Lead at 1037 hours. The aircraft took only a few minor flak hits over the target. Lt Schaft made a 180 with Klette, before deciding to break formation with the other planes. He formed up on some of the other planes from the 324th that were still flying at the briefed altitude and went on back to Bassingbourn without incident.

Lt Steffen's plane, No. 772, "Sweet Freda", flying on the left wing of Lt Woolard, dropped with the Deputy Lead at 1037 hours and took only a few flak hits as she went over the target. Lt Steffens stayed with Klette through the first part of the 360. While doing so, he relayed what Klette was saying to the rest of the crew over the intercom. They started screaming at Lt Steffens not to go around--no way would they go through that flak again. He, too, took their advice, broke formation about half way around to the target and formed up with other 324th Squadron planes to head back to Bassingbourn.

S/Sgt Samuel S. Castiglione, toggler of the Lead of the Fourth Element, No. 153, toggled with the Deputy plane at 1037 hours. However, only eleven of the twenty bombs dropped; nine hung up. No. 153 was hit hard directly over the target. A shell exploded on the right side of the aircraft, between the No. 3 engine and the cockpit. Fortunately, the blast was directed downwards and did not throw flak into the top turret. As it was, the right eardrum of the flight engineer, Sgt Robert H. Cleveland, was blown out. The No. 3 engine was knocked out, a number of holes appeared in the nose and wing, and a wing spar was almost severed. A piece of flak went through the ball turret, barely missing the gunner, Sgt. John F. Unger. Sgt Unger soon became very cold from the subzero wind blowing through the hole. Other flak hits damaged the tail of the aircraft.

Lt McEwen feathered No. 3 engine and in spite of the damage and the extra load from the nine hung-up bombs, was able to maintain altitude. They stayed with Klette as he started the 360. The crew saw the Squadron Lead starting a 360 and wondered

why they were going around again, but before they got to the panic stage, Lt McEwen broke formation with the others and formed up for the trip home. The hung-up bombs were pinned and taken back with them. Most of the trip home was over Allied controlled territory where it was not safe to jettison the bombs.

2Lt Earl G. Pate's No. 844, "Yankee Gal" was flying in the No. 2 position of the Fourth Element. "Yankee Gal" took a lot of small flak hits as she went over the target, but there was no serious structural damage to the plane. The toggler, S/Sgt George D. Kelly, toggled the bombs on the smoke streamer of the Deputy Lead at 1037 hours. Lt Pate followed on the right wing of McEwen half way through the 360, but broke formation with the others, forming up on the first plane he saw from the Squadron for the trip home. He did not see McEwen's plane the rest of the way back. Although the crew saw they were making a turn back towards the target, they did not get upset since they did not realize what was taking place. "Yankee Gal" broke formation before the crew understood Klette had ordered another run over the target.

Things were much more frantic among the crew of Tail-End Charlie, No. 936, with 2Lt Raymond W. Darling's crew aboard. They, too, were shaken by the intensity and accuracy of the flak. However, the plane took only minor hits as it went over the target and dropped on the Deputy Lead at 1038 hours. As No. 936 came off the target, rallying to the right and out of the flak, the crew breathed a sigh of relief that they had survived. Then, Klette came in over the radio ordering the Squadron to make a 360 and go back over with him. Lt Darling switched the radio to the intercom so the crew could be told what Klette was ordering them to do. The crew became rather frantic, including Lt Darling. Lt Darling then switched off the radio and asked for a vote as to whether they should go or not go. The crewmen were yelling for him not to go around and go through the flak again. The tail gunner, S/Sgt Wayne E. Kerr, came on the intercom and said "Lieutenant, I'm married and have a little boy. I'm not going through that again. If you go around, I'm bailing out." Lt Darling told the crew, "We're not going over again." He banked sharply to the right and peeled out of the formation. His crew was ecstatic! Some other planes formed up on No. 936 as they reassembled in the 91st formation for the trip back.

When the other 324th Squadron planes broke formation, the tail gunner, S/Sgt Charles L. Coon, of the Lead plane came in on the intercom to tell Klette the rest of the Squadron had broken formation and that No. 588 was now by herself. Klette then said, "We'll put the pins back in the bombs and go home." They then set out to catch up with the rest

of the 324th Squadron planes that were still at the briefed altitude. Klette was quiet the entire flight back to Bassingbourn.

Strike photos from the 323rd showed good bombing results for the High Squadron. However, because of the dense cloud cover results of the Lead and Low Squadrons were unobserved. It was learned later that 70% of the plant had been destroyed. Only six workers were killed. However, bombs did fall in the near-by residential area, killing 67 people and destroying 335 houses. Seventeen German anti-aircraft gunners were also killed.

After rallying to the right off the target, the 322nd Lead Squadron made a large oval 360 in an attempt to allow the 323rd High Squadron to complete its second bomb run and get back into the formation. The rally point, near Wurzburg, was adjacent to the southern arc of the oval. Those planes of spread-out Low 324th Squadron still at the briefed altitude and with the 91st Group formation also made the 360 with the Lead Squadron. However, the 323rd was too late in coming off the target to get into its proper position and followed along behind the rest of the Group. The Lead and Low Squadrons made "S's" on either side of the prescribed return route to lose time for the High Squadron to catch up. It never did. The 323rd Squadron, however, was in radio contact with the Group Lead at all times and came into visual contact at 1300 hours, before reaching the continental coast.

The 322nd Lead and 324th Low Squadron let-down was started at 1115 hours, leveling off at 8,000 feet at 1146. Let-down resumed at 1225 hours, with the formation crossing the continental coast at 1354 at 3,000 feet and the English coast at 1407 hours at the same altitude. The 323rd High Squadron crossed the continental coast at 1359 hours at 7,000 feet and the English coast at 1410, at 4,000 feet. Aircraft of the Lead Squadron began landing at 1429 hours and were all down by 1501. The first 324th Low Squadron aircraft, No. 000 with Lt Moyer's crew, who had come back with the 305th Group, had landed at 1335 hours. The last 324th plane, No. 623, Lt Nichol's plane, which had come back alone on two engines touched down at 1530 hours.

Although six of the twelve 324th aircraft had sustained major damage over the target, all but two made routine landings at Bassingbourn. Lt Woolard in "Rhapsody in Red" was struggling to stay in the air as the plane crossed over the English coast. One engine was out and another pulling only one-half power. Further, the hydraulic system was knocked out so that there were no brakes. The landing gear electrical system was out and the wheels had to be hand-cranked down. Lt Woolard reached Klette on the radio, requesting permission to land at Alconbury where the runways were longer. Klette came back on the air and told him he would land at

Bassingbourn or "not at all." So it was on to Bassingbourn. With no brakes "Rhapsody in Red" took a "tour of the base" when she landed. The aircraft rolled off the runway veered to the right and headed across the grass towards her hardstand area, hitting the ground crew's tent with her wing as she spun around, throwing part of the tent up onto the radio antenna like wash on a line. She finally came to a stop with only minimal damage to the aircraft. The ground crew chief, S/Sgt John A. Mabray, was taking it all in, apparently more afraid of damage to "his plane" than concern for the flight crew. Lt Woolard had done a good job of getting the plane down on her, and his, final mission.

Lt Nichol in No. 623 had made the flight back on two engines. Fuel was so low by the time they neared Bassingbourn that he did not have time for a normal approach so as to land into the wind. Lt Nichol had to make a straight-in landing with the wind. Even so, Lt Nichol did an excellent job of putting the under powered damaged aircraft down on the runway. When the plane came to a stop and crew was getting out, the Control Tower called for Lt Nichol to report to the tower immediately. He brushed off his "wings" as he went back, anticipating being commended for making such a good landing under the circumstances. Instead, he was chewed out for landing down-wind!

Shortly after debriefing was over and the 324th crews had returned to their billets a voice came over the PA system ordering all first pilots to report to the Squadron orderly room immediately. Those who had undressed threw on some clothes and went over. Ten or eleven of the pilots went in to face a fired-up Klette. He was livid and started in chewing them out in royal order. He called them all "Yellow-bellied SOBs" for breaking formation. Klette kept berating them, saying that the war would have been lost long ago if they had been running it. He said he didn't care if they had dropped their bombs, he had ordered them to go over again with him. After several minutes of chewing them out, Klette told the pilots he was going to court-martial five of the ones he felt most responsible for breaking formation, although he did not name names. Further, he said he was adding five missions to the 35-mission quota for all first pilots who had broken formation. Although Lt Gladitsch had a brief heated discussion with Klette for giving the other pilots extra missions, Klette did not give the pilots a chance to talk or explain what had happened. He simply stormed out of the meeting.

The pilots were devastated. Some felt it was a death sentence. Several were only two or three missions away from finishing their tours. Some of the last missions had been especially scary with heavy flak concentrations. The formation also had been challenged by German Me 262 jet fighters on

the Dresden mission the 17th of April. After Klette left, Lt Auth, the Lead Pilot, got up and tried to calm the others down. He told them "Don't worry about it. There will not be five more missions before the war is over. Five more missions has no meaning." He also told them Klette could not make the additions stick. Higher headquarters would not approve such an increase in the required missions.

Klette was not satisfied with chewing out the pilots. He also called in the Deputy bombardier, Lt Weinstock, and went after him. Although Lt Weinstock held Klette in very high esteem as a combat leader, they had had their personal differences ever since Lt Weinstock had arrived in the Squadron. In spite of their differences, Klette had assigned Lt Weinstock as Deputy bombardier for the Pilsen mission.

The night before the mission, Klette and his good friend 1Lt David Bullen, a pilot in the 324th, were having drinks in the Officer's Club. Lt Bullen had finished his quota of missions with the Dresden mission on the 17th of April. Klette tried to get Lt Bullen to fly the Pilsen mission, but he refused. Then they started talking about the need for a good Deputy bombardier. Lt Bullen told Klette that he should take Lt Weinstock since he was a former instructor and one of the better bombardiers in the Squadron. So, Klette put him on the loading list for the Deputy Lead plane.

The morning following the mission, Lt Bullen was leaving Bassingbourn to return to the States. He mentioned to one of the other pilots he was going down to headquarters to say good-bye to Klette before he left. The pilots told him what had happened and warned him not to see Klette, since he had been the one who had recommended Lt Weinstock for the mission. Lt Bullen left Bassingbourn without saying good-bye. He never saw Manny Klette again.

None of the penalties was laid on. Pilsen was the last mission the 8th Air Force flew. None of the pilots had to fly another combat mission. The entire incident was hushed up officially. Nothing that happened after the target is in the Squadron or Group records. Only Lt Moyer's debriefing report indicates he did not return "as briefed." The section of the debriefing form asking whether or not the plane returned "as briefed" was left blank for the other planes. The debriefing records indicate that Klette's Lead plane dropped at 1036 hours, essentially the same time as the rest of the Squadron. The report states that ten of the nineteen bombs and the smoke streamer were dropped on the target. The remaining nine were reported to have been brought home. However, surviving crew members recalled that all nineteen bombs and the smoke streamer were returned. They did not drop on the target and none was jettisoned.

The report of 2Lt Edward J. Drake, a pilot from the 401st Squadron, flying as formation coordinator for the Group in the tail gun position of the Group Lead aircraft, clarifies little of what actually happened. Lt Drake correctly recorded that the 324th was "scattered in flak" at 1100 hours, 44 minutes after it had dropped. At 1115 he could see neither the 324th Low Squadron nor the 323rd High Squadron. At 1200 hours Lt Drake recorded only that the 324th formation was a "little loose" and that "the Second Element is flying too far out, probably because of battle damage." At 1230 he recorded the Squadron still flying "loosely", with the right wing of the Second Element "too far out and back." At 1300 hours the Second Element was still "too far back." At 1330 the 324th formation was "not too good", with the Second and Third Elements flying "much too far out." At 1400 hours all Elements except the Lead "are out of formation." At 1430 the Second Element "is too far out" and the Fourth Element "much too loose." He gave the lowest ranking of the three Squadrons to the 324th for formation flying on this mission.

Lt Drake did not identify individual planes in his records. Apparently, he was observing random reshuffling of those planes that were still at the briefed altitude and in some semblance of a combat formation. Lt Drake understandably was confused. Only eight 324th planes in the formation were flying at the prescribed altitude. Three 324th planes came back alone or well out of the formation: No. 884 (Lead, Second Element), No. 623 (right wing, Lead Element) and No. 959 (Lead, Third Element). In addition, No. 000 (left wing, Lead Element) joined up with the 305th Group for the return flight. However, Lead Squadron planes of the 379th Group may have also been flying with the 324th planes, adding to the confusion.

Thus, ended the war for the 324th Squadron. A wild and memorable mission. Crewmen who flew on the Pilsen mission remember it as one of the most chaotic and scariest of missions they had flown. Confusion was rampant over the target. With so many Squadrons making additional bombing runs (there were 52 separate Squadron passes over the target), German anti-aircraft fire against late-arriving Squadrons was becoming more and more accurate. A number of planes were going down or dropping out of the formation. This was the scene that greeted the 324th Squadron as it approached the target. It is understandable that everyone was in a high state of anxiety.

All crews of the 324th acted correctly as they went over the target. The Lead bombardier could not identify the AP and rightly did not drop. The Lead plane gave the proper signal for the rest of the Squadron not to drop and to start a 360 by pulling up the bomb bay doors and turning to the right. The

Deputy bombardier thought he had identified the Squadron AP and saw the Lead plane appearing to abort the bomb run at the same instant he and his plane were hit hard by flak. That he dropped his bombs and smoke steamer was as per SOP, which Klette admitted to him years later. Because of all the confusion and heavy flak on the bomb run, toggliers in the other planes were concentrating on watching for the smoke steamer. When a steamer appeared, they immediately toggled their bombs, as they were supposed to do.

What ensued following the bomb run is more questionable. Should Klette have ordered a 360? Should the pilots have broken formation? Was Klette justified in threatening reprisals against the pilots? One obviously has to be circumspect in addressing these questions from the wisdom and safety of 50 plus years of hindsight.

The initial order for a 360 to make a second run over the target was appropriate. The Lead plane had not dropped and Klette could only assume the others had not dropped either. Most other Squadrons in the Strike Force were doing the same. But, should Klette have continued the 360 after being informed that the other planes in the Squadron had dropped? However, with all pilots yelling over the radio at once, it is likely that Klette did not understand that the other planes had dropped. He later said "I did not know they had dropped." There is no way of knowing, of course, if Klette would have eventually aborted the second run had the other pilots not first broken formation.

Should the pilots have broken formation? All except Lt Nichol's plane had accomplished their missions. Approximately 21 tons of bombs already had been dropped by the 324th Squadron. Was it worth risking the lives of the 98 crewmen in the Squadron to drop an additional four tons on the airfield? As it was, 26 crewmen in the other seven Groups were killed. This was a huge price to pay for uncertain potential long-term post-war political reasons. The reactions of the pilots were

appropriate under the circumstances. Klette told Lt Pate years later, that if the Squadron had not dropped on the Deputy bombardier, they would have gone around with him.

The response of Klette to the pilots breaking formation is understandable. A highly respected Squadron Commander, Klette had flown more bombing missions than any other pilot in the 8th Air Force. Klette displayed an intense drive to accomplish his missions. He obviously had been under considerable stress over the past several months, perhaps accounting for his short temper. Klette also had an ego that matched his reputation. It was only natural, therefore, that he would consider the fact that the pilots had broken formation and refused to go around with him to be a reflection on his image as a commander. What is not clear, however, is how much of the ensuing tirade was an impulsive verbal reaction simply to make a point and how much he really meant to follow through with. That he was quiet and did not seem unduly upset on the long flight back from Pilsen suggests much of the ranting against the pilots and Lt Weinstock was simply a way of venting his frustrations.

In the final analysis, however, all the confusion and resulting actions on the Pilsen mission became merely an unrecorded footnote in the history of the 91st Bomb Group. No damage had been done. All crewmen returned. None of the threats was carried out and Klette never brought up the incident again. No more missions were flown in the two remaining weeks of the war. All that mattered then was getting home. The events of the Pilsen mission soon were relegated to the recesses of the minds of the crewmen, only to be brought up decades later during late night war stories at reunions of the 91st Bomb Group. But, the story of how the war ended for the 324th Squadron needs to be preserved. The chaotic events of that day should not disappear with the participants.



No. 993, "Mah Ideel", returning from a mission to Dortmund, Germany on 19 February 1945. (Dale Darling)

"Mary Ruth" Memories of Mobile ... We Still Remember

There was an unusual sense of anticipation at one of the hardstands at USAAF Station 121, otherwise known as Bassingbourn, that early Monday morning of 17 May 1943 in East Anglia, England. This hardstand was the home of B-17F Flying Fortress, Serial Number 41-24485, "Memphis Belle", of the 324th Bombardment Squadron, 91st Bombardment Group (Heavy), 1st Bombardment Wing, VIII Bomber Command. The olive drab-painted "Memphis Belle" bore a number of metal patches, replacement surfaces and splotches of newer paint, stark testimony to the mutilations she had endured during earlier missions. A colorful perky bathing-suited girl painted on both sides of the nose lightened these grim reminders of near fatal encounters with enemy flak and fighter aircraft. The paintings had been rendered there by Cpl Tony Starcer, one of the more famous "nose artists" of World War II.

Crew Chief M/Sgt Joseph M. Giambrone was busily overseeing details of the last minute maintenance work of the ground crew. It was doubly important that, today of all days, "Memphis Belle" would not have to abort. For, today's mission to the German U-boat pens at Lorient, France is an extra special one for the crew of the Memphis Belle. If they return, the pilot, Cpt Robert K. Morgan, and five others of the 10-man crew will have completed their 25th combat mission. VIII Bomber Command has decreed anyone completing 25 combat missions can go home on leave and will not fly any more combat. Only one out of three crewmen survive that long. Those manning the other four positions on the plane today are filling in for crew who have already completed their 25-mission quota. "Memphis Belle" would fly her own 25th mission two days later when 1Lt Clayton L. Anderson and his crew would fly her to the U-boat yards at Kiel, Germany.

"Hell's Angels" of the 303rd Bombardment Group stationed at nearby USAAF Station 107, Molesworth, who will also go to Lorient today, completed her 25th mission last Thursday when she flew to the Avions Poltez aircraft factory at Meaulte, France. VIII Bomber Command would decree "Hell's Angels" to be the first B-17 to achieve this unique accomplishment. The pilot of "Hell's Angels", Cpt Irl E. Baldwin, and three of his crew flew their own 25th missions to Kiel last Friday. The rest of her crew would complete their missions within a few days. However, for the past three weeks VIII Bomber Command publicity has highlighted the "Memphis Belle." Accordingly, following the mission to Kiel Wednesday, "Memphis Belle" and

her crew would be designated by VIII Bomber Command as the first plane and crew to complete 25 combat missions and ordered to return to the States.

Maj William Wyler (the renown Hollywood movie director, who had directed the 1942 Oscar winning-movie, "Mrs. Miniver") and Hollywood cameraman, now Cpt, William Clothier were in part responsible for the publicity surrounding the "Memphis Belle." Assigned to Bassingbourn, they had flown several missions on the "Memphis Belle", including one to Heligoland Island last Saturday, to film actual air combat action. Yesterday, Maj Wyler had arranged for the "Memphis Belle" and her crew to be visited by and filmed with the King and Queen of England in recognition of their pending accomplishments. On 13 June Cpt Morgan and his crew would leave Bassingbourn to fly the "Memphis Belle" back to the United States. There they would receive three months of well-earned public acclaim at War Bond rallies and other patriotic gatherings throughout the country.

Cpt Morgan and the bombardier, Cpt Vincent Evans, would go on to lead the first B-29 bombing mission to Tokyo. From film taken Saturday and on the other missions, Maj Wyler would produce the highly acclaimed morale-boosting documentary movie, "The Memphis Belle", extolling the exploits of the Eighth Air Force (as it would be so designated by the time the movie was released). The movie would appear now and then over the following decades on documentary and history TV channels. Maj Wyler would later direct such movies as "The Detective Story", "Friendly Persuasion", "Roman Holiday", and the Oscar-winning, "The Best Years of Our Lives" and "Ben Hur." "Memphis Belle" eventually would be given a permanent "hardstand" in Memphis, Tennessee, home town of her namesake, Margaret Polk, the fiancée of Cpt Morgan. Forty-seven years later Maj Wyler's daughter, Catherine, would resurrect the "Memphis Belle" and her crew in a commercial movie, "The Memphis Belle." As a result of all this publicity, "Memphis Belle" deservedly would go down in history as one of the two most famous planes of World War II. The other would be "Enola Gay", the B-29 from which the first atom bomb would be dropped in August 1945.

At another nearby Bassingbourn hardstand that same Monday morning, another ground crew, headed by M/Sgt Bert "Black Jack" Pierce, 28, from Harrison, Arkansas (who had been working for Modoc Orchards in Medford, Oregon when he enlisted), was also busily engaged. They were

preparing another B-17F Flying Fortress, Serial Number 42-29536, "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile", of the 401st Squadron of the 91st Group, for today's mission to Lorient.

There was no unusual sense of anticipation as the flight crew arrived, just the understandable mouth-drying anxious nervousness prior to flying a combat mission. The crew quietly went about its preflight routines. The flight deck crew: pilot, 1Lt Kenneth L. Brown, 24, Hodgenville, Kentucky, previously an Aircraft Armorer Staff Sergeant; copilot, 2Lt James H. Quenin, 26, Fort Smith, Arkansas, until recently a Signal Corps Sergeant. The nose crew: navigator, 2Lt Vincent J. Bliley, 26, Ottumwa, Iowa, a former staff artist for the Ottumwa Courier; bombardier, 2Lt James P. Feerick, 24, New York City, who earlier had completed a year's enlistment in the 102nd Engineers of the 47th Division, New York National Guard. The rest of the crew: flight engineer and top turret gunner, T/Sgt James O. Akers, 23, Starbuck, Minnesota, doing construction work in Idaho when he enlisted; radioman, T/Sgt Richard O. Maculley, 19, Chester, Pennsylvania, recognized for his artistic abilities, who left High School at the age of 17 to enlist; ball turret gunner, S/Sgt Henry "Maurice" Crain, 41, "Pops" of the group, originally from Canyon, Texas, with a Bachelors Degree in Journalism from the University of Texas, who had been working in New York as a city editor for the Daily News and as a literary agent; left waist gunner, S/Sgt William G. Allen ("Glenn" to his family, "Bill" to the crew), 21, Athens, Georgia, who had just purchased and was operating two small neighborhood grocery stores when he entered the Service; right waist gunner, S/Sgt Raymond Litzo, 22, Denver, Colorado, who was attending the University of Denver where he was majoring in Business Administration and a member of the golf team when he left school to join the Army Air Corps; tail gunner, S/Sgt William R. Brown, 22, Eldorado, Illinois, one of five brothers in the Service and who had been working for a PepsiCola distributorship.

There was nothing unique about "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" to attract the attention of a Hollywood director, nor for her crew to be roused from their beds yesterday morning to meet the King and Queen. Today's mission would be only her third over enemy territory. The nose painting was not sufficiently artistic to warrant inclusion in any of the books that would appear in later years depicting "nose artwork" of military aircraft. There was no Tony Starcer painting of a perky bathing beauty such as "Memphis Belle." There was no unclad voluptuous woman, such as adorned "Cash and Carrie" of the 569th Squadron of the 390th Group. The name did not represent a famous city, as did "Windy City Challenger" of the 422nd Squadron of

the 305th Group; a popular cartoon character of the day, as did "Fearless Fosdick" of the 358th Squadron of the 303rd Group; or a famous personage, "General Ike" of the 401st Squadron of the 91st Group. Nor was the name rendered in flowing script, as was "Mary Alice" of the 615th Squadron of the 401st Group. Rather, there was simply "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" in plain block dark yellow letters. We are reminded of the lyrics "plain as any name can be" of the George M. Cohan song, "Mary's a Grand Old Name." Even the name itself did not represent what might at first blush suggest a brief romantic war-time encounter by a member of the crew. No. 536 had been named by an unknown crew back in the States, the reason for which became lost in history. When Lt Brown and his crew were assigned the already-named plane superstition prevented them from making a change.

"Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" would fly four more combat missions. On the 29th of May she would fly to "flak city", St Nazaire, France. On 11 June the "Mary Ruth" would attempt to go to the docks of Bremen, Germany. When Bremen was found to be clouded over, the Group would go on to Wilhelmshaven. The day "Memphis Belle" and her crew would leave Bassingbourn to return home to the United States, "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" once again would fly to Bremen. This time she would be successful. On 22 June "Memphis Belle" and her crew would wind up their three-day "tour kick-off" celebration in Memphis, Tennessee. Earlier that day the now sleek "Mary Ruth" would become a scattered pile of smoking rubble in a forest 4 kilometers west of the small village of Wulfen in the Ruhr Valley of Germany. "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" would not quite make it to her final target that day, the synthetic chemical plant at Huls. She would be shot down by yellow-nosed Focke-Wulf 190 fighters flown by pilots of I Group, led by Captain Emil-Rudolf Schnoor, of the Luftwaffe fighter wing, JG 1, flying from the Schiphol Air Field near Amsterdam, Holland.

Three flights of two FW 190's in a frontal attack from slightly high off the right wing of the "Mary Ruth", about ten degrees to the right, would set the No. 4 engine afire, damage the cockpit flight controls and knock out much of the electrical system. "Mary Ruth" would drop out of formation. From all sides, other FW 190's would then attack the now alone "Mary Ruth", their 20 mm cannon shells exploding in the cockpit destroying more controls. The bail-out bell would be rung. Sgt Akers would leave the top turret just before it blew up, throwing exploding ammunition into the cockpit. Lt Brown would struggle to hold the plane level as the right wing burned away, all the while exploding shells sending fragments of the instrument panels into his head and face. Lt Feerick would make two frenzied

trips from the bombardier compartment to the bomb bay to work on the shackle mechanisms of two bombs with a screwdriver, eventually causing them to fall free. This would allow the forward crew to escape by squeezing around the unsalvoed bombs. Lt Brown's efforts would buy time for the rear crew to get to their escape hatches. For his efforts on behalf of the crew, Lt Brown would be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Before all the crew could bail out, the outer wing would blow off throwing "Mary Ruth" into a spinning downward dive, the centrifical force of which would prevent the remaining crew from leaving the plane. Almost immediately thereafter the "Mary Ruth" would explode, throwing free all but Sgts Allen and Maculley, who would remain trapped within the falling fuselage.

In a few minutes it would all be over. "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" would be no more. Sgts Maculley and Allen would lie dead in the wreckage. The remainder of the crew would float to the earth and soon be prisoners of war. Lt Brown and Sgt Crain would manage to evade capture for five days before being taken prisoners. Lt Quenin would sustain compound fractures of both legs when his parachute opened. His legs would escape further injury when landing as he would fall through the tile roof of a farm shed on his shoulder and be held suspended above the floor by the parachute. But, then he would then be shot through one of his legs while being captured by German infantry.

The officers would be sent to the South Compound of Stalag Luft III near the town of Sagan in Silesia, where they would spend most of their time in captivity. Because of the severity of his injuries, Lt Quenin would be removed from Stalag III on 16 February 1944 and repatriated by the Germans through Lisbon, Portugal, arriving back in the United States on the Swedish liner, Gripsholm, 15 March 1944. On 27 January 1945, Lts Bliley, Brown, and Feerick would be forced by the Germans to take part in the freezing cold "Death March" to Stalag VII-A at Moosburg near Munich. They would be held there until liberated by Patton's Third Army on 29 April. The enlisted crew would first be sent to Stalag VII-A at Moosburg. After six months they would be moved in packed railroad box cars to Stalag XVII-B near at Krems, Austria, and be held there until early April 1945. They then would be marched up the Danube River to Braunau, Austria, where they would be liberated by advancing Americans.

There would be no War Bond rallies or heroes' welcome for the crew of "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" when they returned. Only families and friends would be there to celebrate their homecoming. Lt Brown would remain in the Air

Force to fly B-29s in Korea and B-52s in Vietnam, eventually retiring as a Colonel. He would then obtain a Masters Degree from the University of Arizona. Afterwards he would serve as an administrator in the University Medical School until retiring again, this time to his golf game in La Jolla, California. Lt Quenin would recover from his injuries to return to flight status to fly in the Berlin Airlift. Later he would serve as Director of Materiel for the 505 Tactical Air Control Group, and fly a few "unofficial" missions, in Vietnam, finally retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel to sell real-estate in Costa Mesa, California. Lt Bliley would return to civilian life to own and operate an oil distributorship in Milwaukie, Oregon. Lt Feerick would become a Captain in the New York Fire Department and later serve as an administrator at Mt. Sinai Hospital, and then as an Ordained Deacon in the Catholic Church.

Sgt Akers would remain in the Army when the Air Force split away, serving in Korea. He would retire as a Warrant Officer to Colorado Springs, Colorado where he would engage in a number of business ventures and work for the U.S. Postal Service. Sgt Brown would remain in the Air Force as a supply sergeant, eventually retiring to become manager of the P. N. Hirsch Department Store in Humbolt, Tennessee. Sgt Crain would return to New York to take up again his prewar activities as a literary agent and to operate his own agency. Sgt Litzo would return to Denver to work for Boyd Distributing, a major appliance distributorship, and to continue his avocation with golf. Sgt Pierce would leave the Service to return to Medford, Oregon to become a manager for Modoc Orchards. Sgt Allen would return to the Oconee Hills Cemetery in Athens, Georgia. Sgt Maculley would remain in the American Cemetery at Margarten, The Netherlands.

"'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" would not survive to take part in the more memorable events of the air war over Europe. She would not participate in the July 1943 "Blitz Week." She would not fly the Schweinfurt missions of 17 August and 14 October 1943. She would not be there to join in the February 1944 "Big Week." She would not answer the call to "The Big B", Berlin. She would not partake in the D-day invasion. And, she would not share in "Operation Chowhound" dropping food rather than bombs to the starving populations of the occupied countries during the final weeks of the war. "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" was not allowed as long a life as was "Nine-0-Nine" of the 323rd Squadron, 91st Group, who successfully completed 140 missions over Europe. "Mary Ruth" was denied the thrill of buzzing the airfield at Bassingbourn, as was allowed upon completion of the 25th mission.

Still, "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" would be a part of history, even if mainly as an unnoticed participant. Her first mission to Keil, along with Cpt Baldwin and "Hell's Angels" and "Memphis Belle", flown that day by Lt John H. Miller, on 14 May, had been the longest and farthest of VIII Bomber Command to that date. She, too, would complete the mission to Lorient today, as would "Hell's Angels" on her 28th and Cpt Morgan on his 25th mission, returning unscathed. She also had flown the 91st Group mission last Saturday, along with "Memphis Belle", officially to Wilhelmshaven. When they found the primary target clouded over, the planes of the 91st dropped their bombs on the submarine pens and other naval installations on Heligoland Island. This latter mission would be used as the setting for Maj Wyler's documentary. "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile", represented by Lt Brown's name, appears on the flight formation board shown during the mission briefing in the movie. "Mary Ruth's" seventh, and last, mission would also be historic. This would be the first "Maximum Effort" mission against the German fighter plane industry following realization that strategic bombing would not be successful until the threat from fighters was eliminated. The Huls mission would also be the first "Maximum Effort" daytime mission flown by VIII Bomber Command into the Ruhr Valley, which, because of the intense flak, soon would come to be known as "Happy Valley."

True, "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" and her crew flirted briefly with fame from time to time over the years. John Steinbeck, a prewar friend of Sgt Crain, visited Bassingbourn long enough to write nine newspaper articles about day-to-day life in VIII Bomber Command. These were based on the crew of the "Mary Ruth." His projected 25-article series would be cut short when the "Mary Ruth" failed to return from Huls. Six of these articles would find their way into Steinbeck's 1958 book, Once There Was a War. In 1992, a color picture of the "Mary Ruth" taken on the Huls mission, just before she was shot down, would appear on the cover of B-17, The Flying Fortress, by William N. Hess. A short while later, there was a chance encounter by the free-lance writer, Chuck Dunning, and Ken Brown. This would result in an article in the July 1995 issue of "Aviation History" describing the events of the final flight and death of the "Mary Ruth."

In general, however, "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" and her crew, as was true of the thousands of other B-17 Flying Fortresses, B-24 Liberators, B-26 Marauders, B-25 Mitchells, and their "little friends", the fighter escorts, and their crews, would be destined to do their flying and dying, oftentimes all too soon, during those early years of

the air war over Europe, achieving lasting notice only to their families and friends. The airmen associated with the "Mary Ruth" would typify the thousands of "Black Jack" Pierces who worked frantically, often under almost impossible time and physical constraints, to repair and maintain "their" planes so as to "loan" them to the air crews for the next mission; the thousands of Ken Browns and Jim Quenins who wrestled their bomb-laden planes off the runways and struggled to keep them in the air when hit by flak and fighter cannon fire; the thousands of Vince Blileys who made certain the planes slipped into the proper places within their Elements as the formations came together, were on time and on course to the targets, and navigated them back to their hardstands when crippled by flak or fighters and had to leave their formations; the thousands of Jim Feericks who stared into the face of the head-on attacking Luftwaffe fighters and listened to the clatter of flak tearing through the Alclad aluminum skin of the fuselage, all the while keeping a steady hand on the Norden bombsight to make certain the bombs were placed on the target; the thousands of Jim Akers, who kept the planes' flak-shattered equipment working, as well as manning the upper turret guns; the thousands of Bill Browns, Maurice Crains, and Ray Litzos who did their best to keep at bay the Messerschmidt 109 and the Focke-Wulf 190 fighter aircraft; and the thousands of Dick Maculleys and Glenn Allens who all too frequently died with their planes. As such, the crew of "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" epitomizes the unselfish dedication and ultimate sacrifices made by those who struggled to keep the planes flying and who flew and died in relative obscurity in the air over "Fortress Europe" during the period of 1942-1945.

Revisionist historians would argue over the actual contribution of strategic bombing in bringing to an end that conflict. However, the crews of "Memphis Belle", of "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" and of the hundreds of other planes in VIII Bomber Command were not concerned about history that early Monday morning in East Anglia. Rather, they were there to do a job that had to be done. They had responded to a request by their country to perform a dangerous duty that was deemed necessary and essential, given the knowledge of conditions at the time. They had volunteered for this duty not to seek glory, not to become heroes, not to achieve a place in history, but simply because their country was in trouble and needed them. Circumstances placed some of the planes and some of the crews more in the limelight of fame than others. All, the "Memphis Bells", the "Nine-0-Nines", the "Hell's Angels", and the "Mary Ruths", flew their missions as they were trained to do. The fate of many would be to be blown to bits at

the end of the runways while taking off, to be reduced to rubble in a farmers field in Germany, to be entombed forever in the cold bottom waters of the North Sea, or to be incinerated into nothingness in a fiery ball over Berlin.

Others would survive, to end up a field near Kingman, Arizona, Altus, Oklahoma, or Walnut Ridge, Arkansas. From there they would be converted into aluminum siding to build the Levittowns, into electric skillets, into toasters, into waffle irons, into patio chairs, and into the innumerable other consumer products needed to fulfill the postwar dreams of America. Sentimentalists may feel that to be an ignominious ending for those planes who had endured so much and still had carried the day. However, it was for the very fulfillment of those postwar dreams that they had risked the midair collisions while corkscrewing upward around the Buncher and Splasher homing beacons to assemble their formations in the clouded skies over East Anglia, had braved the box barrages of flak over St. Nazaire and Merseburg, had flown into "Happy Valley", and had fought off the swarms of Me 109s and FW 190s on the way to Schweinfurt and Berlin. They had done their job and they had done it well. They would no longer be needed as instruments of war. They would then be ready for realization of the peace for which they had fought so valiantly.

The years would flow by swiftly. Soon the planes would all be gone. The only record of their passing this way would consist of photographs of planes and their crews illustrating histories of World War II. For a time, Memorial Associations of veterans of the various Bombardment Groups would keep alive the memories of the planes and events. However, like the planes themselves, one by one their former crews would quietly fold their wings. Soon only impersonal written accounts and fading photographs would remain. Society has a way of assuring that its heroes are not consigned to oblivion. The devotion and dedication, the skills and sacrifices, the convictions and courage of the "Memphis Belles", the "Nine-O-Nines" and the "Hell's Angels", and their crews, will not be forgotten so long as there is written history. But, we also have an obligation to ensure that, as generations pass, there will be those who will say of all the "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobiles", and their crews..."We remember."

Now, let us return once again to Bassingbourn and to "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile." Thirty six days have passed. The Lorient mission has been completed. All planes returned safely. Other missions have been flown and "Memphis Belle" and her crew have returned to the States. It is another early morning in East Anglia. Today is Tuesday 22 June 1943, 0630 Double British

Summer Time. Another mission is on, the Huls raid. "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" will be flying in the No. 3 position (rear outer left) of the last three-plane element of the echeloned left, Low Squadron of the Low Group, "Tail-end Charlie." The predawn flurry of ground crew activities has ceased and the crews are standing quietly beside their planes. The air crews are aboard, the preflight check lists completed. An apprehensive somber silence lies over Bassingbourn. In Memphis, Tennessee it is late evening 21 June. The crew of the "Memphis Belle" is still being feted by a grateful citizenry.

Two green flares form an arch over the field. From dispersal points scattered about the base there comes an erratic chorus of sputtering coughs as planes come to life. Soon the ragged rumblings coalesce into a penetrating ear-rendering roar as the multitude of engines are run-up and additional instruments checked. Slowly the olive drab graceful, but deadly, low-winged fortresses begin moving down the taxiways in two weaving, snaking, nose to tail columns, brakes squealing, toward the end of the runway. The columns pause. Two flares arc upwards from Flying Control on the second story balcony outside the control room--green-green. The first B-17, No. 453, "The Bearded Beauty--Mizpath", belches a cloud of blue smoke and rumbles down the 6,000 foot Runway 25, slowly struggling to clear the trees at the end of the runway. At 30-second intervals another follows, another, another, and yet another. No. 797, "Old Ironsides", leaves on her journey to the bottom of the North Sea. No. 132, "Royal Flush!", lifts off on her final flight. No. 998 (she has not yet been named) tucks in her wheels one last time. No. 789, "Golden Bear", heads for her long hibernation.

There is a hectic scramble around "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile". The No. 3 engine supercharger is not working. Sgt Pierce clambers aboard and works rapidly. The pressure comes up seconds before an abort is declared. He has done his job. Brakes released, "Mary Ruth" jerks away from her hardstand, rolls along the taxiway, pivots, and lumbers quickly down runway No. 25. She is the last plane of the Group to depart Bassingbourn today. For the last time her wheels lift away from what later generations will refer to as the "hallowed grounds" of East Anglia. "Mary Ruth" rises hurriedly and disappears into the distance as she heads for her nirvana and the obscurity of history. We watch her vanish with the confidence that those same later generations will say of "Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" and of the others who will not return today, and all the days to come, "We remember...we still remember."



S/Sgt James M. Bechtel. Sgt Bechtel flew as a replacement waist gunner on 2Lt John A. Coen's crew on 28 March 1943. Sgt Bechtel's original crew had been shot down on 4 March 1943. His aircraft ditched in the North Sea, with the pilot, 1Lt Allen Brill and copilot, 1Lt Allan W. Lowry, drowning while saving their crew. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt James E. Morgan, Jr., also drowned. Lt Brill's surviving crewmen were then split up to fly as fill-ins on other crews. Lt Coen's plane was shot down on the 28th, killing all ten crewmen aboard. This was Sgt Bechtel's fourth combat mission.



John A. Coen Crew, at debriefing on 22 March 1943. See opposing page for names and details. (Harry Strozzi)

The Coen Crew, a Dedication

Those of us who have not experienced the trauma of flying bombing missions cannot even begin to comprehend the feelings evoked by the stresses of combat and knowledge that any second may be your last. During the heat of battle so many things were happening that most crewmen simply were too busy to be scared. The professionalism of doing their job, their duty, overrode their fears. It was in the calm following the mission that realization of what had happened and what could have happened sunk in. Crewmen refer to the "Thousand Yard Stare" so prevalent on the faces of men during debriefings conducted immediately upon returning from a mission.

The picture on the opposing page graphically depicts the emotions of crewmen when it finally came home to them what they had experienced. More than any words can describe, the looks on the faces of these men communicate to us what bomber crews of that time endured. Accordingly, I dedicate this book to the crew in the photograph.

The picture is of 2Lt John A. Coen and his crew, taken at debriefing on 22 March 1943, following a mission to the port of Wilhelmshaven. There they took part in an attack on the German pocket battleship, Admiral Sheer, and other port installations. The German defense, both intensity of anti-aircraft fire over the target and attacks by fighters, was among the most aggressive the 91st Bomb Group had experienced up to then. Almost all bombers received battle damage. For most of the men in the picture, this was only their second mission.

Lt Coen and his original crew arrived at Bassingbourn in early February. Lt Coen flew five missions as a copilot to gain combat experience on 14, 16, 26, and 27 February and on 6 March. On 4 March, most of his crew was sent out with an experienced pilot, 1Lt Harold H. Henderson, along with an experienced flight engineer and waist gunner. They were shot down, with only the flight engineer, T/Sgt Randle E. Nettles, surviving to become a POW.

Lt Coen began flying as a first pilot on 8 March. Since his crew was lost, he was assigned a crew made up mainly of crewmen from the 92nd Bomb Group on detached assignment with the 91st Group. The crew included his original flight engineer, T/Sgt Samuel L. Williams, and waist gunner, Sgt Ben W. Billingsley. He took this crew out again on 12 and 13 March. On the 18th of March he was assigned the crew of 2Lt Clayton L. Anderson, who had just arrived at Bassingbourn. Lt Anderson was flying his combat orientation missions. There was a shortage of flight crews at that time. Lt Anderson's crew was assigned to Lt Coen, now an experienced pilot, to fly until Lt Anderson was ready to take them out himself.

On the 22nd of March, the day the picture was taken, Lt Coen's previous crew, composed mainly of 92nd crewmen, as well as Sgts Williams and Billingsley, was taken out by Cpt Hascall C. McClellan, the 324th Operations Officer. Cpt McClellan's plane went down, carrying the entire crew to the bottom of the North Sea. The crewmen in this picture most likely had just learned of the fate of their fellow crewmen.

The men in the picture, from the far right, counterclockwise around the table: **2Lt John A. Coen, pilot; S/Sgt Louis T. McLane, tail gunner; S/Sgt Paul E. Kyes, waist gunner; T/Sgt John C. Strozzi, flight engineer, top turret gunner; Sgt Edward F. Simon, waist gunner; 2Lt David F. Gladhart, copilot; S/Sgt Francis E. Byrne, ball turret gunner; Sgt Domenic A. Caruso, radio operator; 2Lt John W. Butler, bombardier; 2Lt Harold A. Davidson, navigator; unidentified debriefing officer.**

For the next mission, 28 March, 2Lt Caryll D. Nobbs replaced Lt Gladhart as copilot and S/Sgt James M. Bechtel replaced Sgt Simon.

Lt Coen's plane went down on the 28th, six days after this picture was taken. All ten crewmen aboard were killed. Sgt Simon was killed in action on 22 June 1943. Lt Gladhart was severely wounded in the left upper forearm by 20 mm cannon fire on 21 May but eventually recovered to resume flying on 16 July. Lt Gladhart completed his 25-mission tour, the only crewman in the photograph to survive the war.



324th Squadron planes in combat formation. Note the two three-plane elements. Left Element, from top to bottom: No. 880, "Little Miss Mischief"; No. 887, "Old Battle Ax"; No. 515, "The Wild Hare". Right Element: No. 884, "Yankee Gal"; No. 311, "Terry's Tiger"; No. 993, "Mah Ideel"; the plane in the foreground (No. 085, "Yankee Belle") is flying in the No. 3 position of the Element in which the plane from which the picture was taken (No. 988, "The B.T.O.") is flying (in the No. 2 position). The lead plane of this element (No. 128, "Dear Becky") is out of the picture to the right. (Dale Darling)



B-17F No. 536, "Mary Ruth" Memories of Mobile, on a combat mission to Huls, Germany, 22 June 1943. She was shot down later on this mission. The B-17 in the upper left, No. 475, "Stric-Nine", was shot down over the Channel 10 July 1943. The plane from which the picture was taken, No.069, "Our Gang", was shot down 17 August 1943. (Ken Brown)

Acknowledgments

I interviewed by phone over 500 former crewmen or their families in putting together these stories. All were most cooperative in taking the time to talk to a perfect stranger calling them out of the clear asking for details of events of more than half a century past. All too often the information I needed brought back unpleasant memories. To a person, without hesitation, they shared with me as much detail as they could recall. Regrettably, space does not allow me to recognize each of them individually. I would be remiss, however, if I did not recognize the assistance of a few individuals. First and foremost I am most grateful to Bill Potter without whose vast knowledge and records dealing with No. 220 and the extraordinary amount of time he spent in ferreting out specific details, I would not have been able to trace her full history. Dale Darling, who flew his second combat mission in No. 220, supplied invaluable records and detailed information relating to individuals and events of the time. Yvonne Judy Peck most graciously provided personal information regarding Don Judy, including a copy of his pilot's log. Bill Arthur was extremely helpful in supplying accounts of his missions in No. 220 as well as allowing me to copy his original diary. Robert Margolis made available his extensive logs of missions flown with the Hooper Maplesden crew of No. 220. Andy Schumacher provided detailed notes from the John Madsen crew of No. 220. Joe Weinstock, Ray Darling and Bill Auth supplied the primary framework for the Pilsen mission story. Ken Brown was especially helpful in providing background regarding "Mary Ruth" Memories of Mobile, the plane and crew that first sparked my interest in this endeavor. To all I extend my sincere appreciation, not only for their assistance with these stories, but more importantly for what they did for all of us "back then."



No. 220, "Lady Lois"/"Little Jean", landing at Bassingbourn upon returning from a mission over Germany. (Andy Schumacher)

Rear cover photographs

Top: Nose art of No. 220, "Lady Lois"; Bob Boyd, bombardier of the Bill Arthur crew, looking out the side nose window. (Bill Arthur)

Bottom: Nose art of No. 712, "My Prayer." (Paul Burton)

